

**Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Science and International Studies**

The Petroleum Industry and Socio-political Change in Mauritania: 2001-2011

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As soon as a tribe had allied sufficient forces to take over a wing of government, it disintegrated in internal strife over its spoils, only to be overtaken by another tribe with stronger internal cohesion. Thus continued a cyclical mechanism of hostile takeovers, termed “predatory redistribution”, redirecting national wealth to a handful of tribes.

Noel Foster

“Mauritanian: The struggle for Democracy” (2011, 33)

(Quoted page 108)

We were having this conversation and the President’s secretary, a young military man, came up to Zeidane and said, “The President is asking for you”... Therefore, off he went and took the lift [to the President’s chambers]. He was gone for a minute, and he came back almost immediately. He tapped me on the shoulder as he walked past, smiled at me and said, “Hey ho! The President says I can do as I please!”

Isselmou Abdelkader

(Interview 48A, 1 January 2012 - quoted page 152)

« Oui, nous aussi nous voulons la démocratie pour notre pays !
Mais laissez-nous la prendre à notre propre pas, à notre propre manière. »

General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz

(quoted page 172)

La France va créer en Afrique une force militaire d’intervention. Où ?
Là où elle le jugera opportun... De l’Afrique française, nous sommes passés par la France-Afrique, pour revenir maintenant à l’Afrique de la France. Les pouvoirs en place [des despotes] y trouvent leurs comptes, et la France y a grand intérêt...

Debellahi Abdeljelil

Le Quotidien de Nouakchott 16/12/2013

Declaration

I have been presented with several unpublished documents, some accepted for the award of degrees in other educational institutions and these are duly referenced in the body of this thesis. Due reference is also made to all other published material and documents, as well as in the case of little-known information being imparted by word of mouth, as in the case of informal and formal discussions. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made

Due to the nature and extent of contact that I have had with Mauritania and Mauritians since 1994, many aspects of the social, historical and political facts and situations discussed are considered “common knowledge”. “Facts” dealing with current and historical events, famous people, geographic areas, etc are taken as “common knowledge”. To be classified as such, these “facts” must be known by many people and, in this case, in the international context. However, plagiarism has no clear boundary with what is considered “common knowledge”. Therefore, where possible, I have cited references when dealing with such topics that have the potential of falling inside the boundaries of plagiarism.

My travels in Africa and my close association with West Africans in many occupations, form the groundwork for the research on my recent master thesis as well as the doctoral research presented herein. The ideas and opinions on Mauritania are personal and arise as a result of my efforts in assisting in the development of its petroleum and mineral resources over a period of some 35 years. Most especially, the topic of this thesis is chosen out of the strong interest that I have developed through work carried out in the promotion and development of Mauritania over a period of 20 years between 1994 and 2014.

Max de Vietri

22 April 2014

Perth, Western Australia

Abstract

This thesis examines the establishment of a petroleum industry in Mauritania, from its beginning in 2001 to 2011. It focuses on the interaction of the oil industry and the changing political character of the country, and assesses the role played by the oil industry in political changes that occurred at national and sub-national levels during the period.

The theoretical starting point of the thesis is the debate over what has come to be known as the ‘oil curse’, an hypothesis that has taken on differing meanings as proponents applied it to various cases. The study examines the argument that the discovery of oil contributes to political instability, focusing on Mauritania from 2001 to 2011. It argues that contextually grounded root-causes with long historical linkages are much more important precipitants to instability and socio-political upheavals than the development of the oil industry. Of particular importance in the understanding of political instability is the complex relationship between state authority in its civil and military forms and long-standing tribal and ethnic institutions in Mauritania.

Another important precipitant of political upheavals in Mauritania is foreign interference in Mauritanian affairs by France and Mauritania’s neighbours, which pre-dates the country’s independence. The original contribution to knowledge of this research thesis is that it argued that while oil has played some role in Mauritania’s political development from 2001 to 2011, it has been of minor importance in the competition among political elites for control of the state and the wider civil society.

The study is based on primary research in Mauritania using a variety of qualitative techniques, including interviews and conversations with a range of state and non-state actors, supplemented by documentary and other secondary sources.

Acknowledgement

I am especially indebted, in the first instance, to Professor Bob Pokrant for accepting to act as my principal supervisor and give his invaluable academic support to my research. Without Bob's guidance, I would not have been able to progress through the research, however interesting, and not able to produce this tome. I am grateful for the likewise invaluable support of Dr Duncan Clarke, a distinguished author, writer and commentator on Africa and its developing oil and gas industry. He generously acted as external supervisor, and gave much support and guidance in understanding Africa and its development path. Eve Howell, Chairperson of EMR Resources Pty Ltd, has been especially supportive, giving guiding suggestions, insisting on a discreet approach to Woodside's involvement in Mauritania, helping to compile the references and reviewing the many drafts.

I am grateful to Dr Serge Robert, Dr Robert Verné but especially to Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte and his wife Professor Marie-Claire Bonte, for the many hours of informal but educational discussions we spent on the verandah of Monsieur and Madame Gaye Silly Soumaré's auberge in December 2011.

I am most grateful to the many Mauritaniens who helped, but especially, to my friend Mr M'Boye Ould Arafa, who together with Dr Brian Welch, allowed me to grab the opportunity of Mauritania beginning in 1994. I also wish to thank Ly Ciré, who discussed many touchy topics in an open and honest manner. I am grateful to Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall for making me an Officer of the Order of National Merit for service to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the second such award to a foreigner after President Charles de Gaulle.

I thank Hilda Feyfant and her colleagues in Queensland, Noumea, New Zealand and New South Wales who helped me transcribe and translate some 1.2 million kilobytes of interviews recorded in French, as well as Louise Mills who carefully edited the final thesis.

Dedication

As for my master thesis on Mauritania and the petroleum industry, this doctoral research thesis is dedicated to Mr M'Boye Ould Arafa, ex-Director General of the Mines and Petroleum Department of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, between 1994 and 1998. Mr M'Boye Ould Arafa was instrumental in the earliest realisation of the opportunity for petroleum discovery in his country as well as for encouraging Dr Brian Welch and I in the inaugural moves to realise this opportunity. He is the man who welcomed us to his country in 1994 and trusted us, fumbling foreigners.

This doctoral research thesis and the work that has gone to realise it are also dedicated to Dr Brian Welch. Dr Brian Welch's guidance and close mentoring over many years meant that I was able to achieve what very few geologists are able to achieve; accreditation for the discovery of new resource provinces; the hydrocarbon-rich offshore Coastal Basin of Mauritania and the potentially gas-rich inland Taoudeni Basin of Mauritania and Mali.

Lastly, I wish to dedicate this thesis to Eve Howell whose encouragement helped me to complete the task, as I attempted each increasingly difficult step of the research project.

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Important Dates and Milestones

Translated from: http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Gouvernement-pays_60_mauritanie
and expanded by the researcher

- 10,000 BP: Black Africans, the Bafour, inhabit the region, fertile in that period.
- 5000 BP: Climatic changes drive most of the people south, but some remain as oasis dwellers and others as coastal fishermen, today known as the Imraguen.
- From 500 BC: communication with northern landmass and movement of people (eg. Vandals) into northern Africa.
- 25 BC: Caesar Augustus grants Kingship of “both Mauritania” to Juba II, but continued guerrilla warfare between Romanised settlements and nomadic pastoralists until Rome’s retirement from the region (Sigman 1976)
- 8th to 17th century: influx of Arab tribes, possibly due to climatic changes on the Arabian Peninsula. They bring religion, language, Bedouin ways and camels.
- 1649: Establishment of a French trading post at St Louis, at the mouth of the Senegal River. Trading slowly spreads up the river over the next 250 years
- 1885: At the Berlin Conference, France is formally attributed French West Africa. Military governance is established and sits in Saint Louis.
- 1903: The French government passes a decree recognising “The Protectorate of the Country of the Maures of the Lower Senegal” in acknowledgement of the military support of the pro-French Maures of the emirates of Brakna, Trarza and Idouaich.
- 1920: A decree was passed which uses the name “Mauritania” for the first time
- 1947: Last battle fought against colonialism by Maures in northern part of the Territory. Although not designated as a sovereign country, the name “Mauritania” is officially used by the French.
- 28 November 1960: Declaration of Independence.
- 20 May 1961: Promulgation of a Constitution establishing a presidential system.
- 20 August 1961: Moktar Ould Daddah is elected President.
- 12 January 1965: The Party for Mauritanian people (PPM) becomes the single parliamentary party.
- 9 August 1971: Election of President Moktar Ould Daddah for a third term.

- 8 July 1973: Creation of a new currency, the Ouguiya.
- 26 November 1973: distancing from France and membership of the Arab League.
- 28 November 1974: Nationalisation of MIFERMA.
- 14 November 1975: Agreement with Spain and Morocco on Western Sahara whose territory is divided between Morocco (2/3) and Mauritania (1 /3).
- December 1975: Beginning of the conflict with the Polisario Front over sovereignty of Western Sahara and especially the region of Tiris el-Gharbia.
- 8 August 1976: Moktar Ould Daddah's begins fourth term as elected president.
- 10 July 1978: Military coup d'état led by Lieutenant -Colonel Mustapha Ould Saleck.
- 3 June 1979: Resignation (overthrow?) of Mustapha Ould Saleck as President of the Military Committee for National Salvation (CMSN). Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Louly succeeded him.
- 5 August 1979: Agreement in Algiers with the Polisario Front. Mauritania renounced its sovereignty over Tiris El-Gharbia.
- 4 January 1980: Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Louly is removed by Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Ould Khouna Haidallah.
- 10 May 1980: Establishment of Islamic Sharia law.
- 5 July 1980: First decree abolishing slavery passed by independent Mauritania.
- 16 March 1981: Failed coup attempt, supported by Morocco, by the Alliance for a Democratic Mauritania (AMD).
- 12 December 1984: Successful coup d'état by Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya.
- April 1986: Publication by the FLAM (Afro-Mauritanian movement of the "Manifesto of the oppressed black African". Leads to unrest and political repression.
- April 1989: Violent racial clashes in both Mauritania and Senegal. Mass expulsions from Mauritania of black Africans to Senegal and Mauritians living in Senegal.
- June 1990: Franco-African Forum, François Mitterrand gives his famous speech tying foreign aid to democratisation, beginning with multi-party rule

- 12 July 1991: Adoption by referendum of a new constitution along the lines demanded by the West.
- 25 July 1991: Set up of multiparty system and freedom of the press.
- 24 January 1992: Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya wins Presidential elections.
- November 1994: Researcher's first visit to Mauritania.
- July 1995: Beginning of interest by Ashton Mining (soon absorbed by Rio Tinto) in diamond potential of north Mauritania at researcher's instigation. De Beers and several exploration companies quickly follow, setting up offices in Nouakchott over the next twelve months.
- October 1995: At the request of M'Boye Ould Arafa, Director of the Department of Mines and Energy, the archives of the department are searched by Dr Brian Welch and the researcher for evidence of petroleum potential overlooked by pre-1989 explorers.
- July 1996: Submission by Elixir Corporations Pty Ltd and Hardman Resources NL of first PSC agreements to government over Blocks 3, 4 and 5. Awarded some 9 months later.
- August 1998: Woodside joins Hardman and Elixir in Mauritanian joint venture.
- November 1999: Seismic work begins offshore Mauritania.
- 12 December 1997: Re-election of President Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya.
- 28 October 2000: Crackdown on opposition parties and aggressive repression over several months.
- 9 April 2001: Recognition of six new political parties.
- End-May 2001: Chinguetti oilfield discovery is announced by joint venture.
- Early-June 2001: Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd sells its JV interest to Roc Oil Ltd.
- Late-2001: Applications for offshore and adjacent onshore PSCs multiply beyond the wildest expectations of Mauritania authorities.
- 17 July 2001: Return to Mauritania of former President Moktar Ould Daddah after 23 years of exile.
- 2 January 2002: The government bans the racist opposition party, Action for Change (AC). Active repression of political opponents.
- Early-June 2003: The viability of the Chinguetti oilfield is confirmed and work

begins on the commercialisation of the presumed recoverable oil reserves.

- 8 June 2003: Violent military coup attempt by Commander Saleh Ould Hanenna against President Taya. Several hundred soldiers and civilians die.
- 7 November 2003: 3rd election victory for President Ould Taya.
- 21 July 2004: Council of Ministers sits to consider proposals for new laws. Minister of Petroleum and Energy is allowed “to do as he pleases” by President Ould Taya about requested amendments to Woodside Joint venture production-sharing contracts (PSCs).
- 9 August 2004: Purported foiled assassination attempt against President Ould Taya.
- 28 September 2004: A purported 2nd attempted coup by Saleh Ould Hanenna and Captain Abderrahmane Ould Minnih fails.
- 3 August 2005: Successful military coup d’état against President Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, overthrown by the head of his presidential guard, Colonel Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, General Muhammad Ould Al-Ghazwani, together with the head of national security and Aziz’s cousin, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall. Aziz is today regarded as the purported leader, but his cousin is selected as chair of the “Military Council for Justice and Democracy ”.
- 4 August 2005: Mauritania is excluded from the African Union, but international relations are quickly re-established by Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall.
- October to December 2005: In the course of drafting the 2006 National Budget, and checking proposed flow rates and projected income stream with Woodside, a shortfall is discovered and on digging deeper, amendments to the original PSC agreements are discovered. However, these were unprocessed through the proper parliamentary channels.
- 6 February 2006: Public declaration by Mauritanian Government that Woodside is acting against the wellbeing of Mauritania.
- 24 February 2006: First Oil. Production begins at Chinguetti but a sombre mood prevails.
- 25 June 2006: Ely Mohamed Vall brings in constitution limits to presidential terms, through a public referendum.
- 25 June 2006: Ely Mohamed Vall applies for membership to EITI for Mauritania.
- September 2006: Chinguetti daily production begins to drop from the planned 75,000 barrels a day to below 40,000 barrels a day by end-2006.
- 25 March 2007: Presidential elections bring Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi to power.

- Early-2007: Chinguetti production begins to drop rapidly over the next twelve months to below 2,500 barrels a day in mid-2008. Note that viable commercial production was only achievable at a daily production rate above 7,000 barrels a day.
- 10 April 2007: Mauritania is welcomed back into the African Union.
- 8 August 2007: Anti-slavery laws are once again passed by the government.
- December 2007: Woodside announces sale of its Mauritanian interest to Petronas.
- 1 February 2008: The Israeli embassy in Nouakchott is attacked.
- 6 August 2008: President Abdallahi fires General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and four other generals from the parliament, but is deposed a few hours later in a coup d'état, by the same military personnel.
- 17 January 2009: Diplomatic relations with Israel are frozen.
- March 2009: Closure of the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott.
- 15 April 2009: President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz officially retires from the army in order to be able to stand in the presidential election.
- 15 April 2009: Ba Mamadou M'Bare becomes president for the transitional period.
- 18 July 2009: Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz wins the 2009 presidential election. Regarded as a constitutional coup d'état. 5 August 2009 nominated President.
- Mid-2009: Viability re-established at Chinguetti at 8,000 barrels per day by Petronas.
- 24 September to 28 November 2011: Street protests against what they call a "discriminatory" national census by the Afro-Mauritanian group "Do not touch my nationality".
- 13 October 2012: President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz is shot by a military patrol on the outskirts of Nouakchott and evacuated to Paris (France) where he was hospitalised. Many believe it is a failed coup attempt.
- March to Sept 2013: Very active campaign to discredit President Abdel Aziz and to force him to step down. The pressure is presently continuing.
- 17 September 2013: President Abdel Aziz chooses new ministers, several are Members of the Oualad Bousbaa tribe, the President's tribe and associates.
- 23 September 2013: Samba Thiam, leader of the FLAM returns after 23 years in exile, declaring that his organisation has "national" ambitions.

- 26 September 2013: Street march by the Afro-Mauritanian group "Do not touch my nationality" protesting against the police death of a young Afro-Mauritanian on 24 September 2011.

The coverage of the most pertinent events to the present research terminated end-September 2013 on submission of thesis to the editor.

Map of Mauritania



Fig 1 Map of Mauritania

(Retrieved from <http://geology.com/world/Mauritania-satellite-image.shtml> 1/10/13)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The thesis examines the period from 2001 to 2011 during which the petroleum industry was first established in Mauritania and in which the present researcher was involved commercially with the process. It focuses on the interaction of the oil industry and the changing political character of the country. In particular, it assesses the role played by the oil industry in the political changes and the instability that occurred at national and sub-national levels during the period. The theoretical starting point of the thesis is the debate over what has come to be known as the ‘oil curse’. It adopts a critical view of the oil curse hypothesis and argues that the discovery of oil was but one of several factors that contributed to Mauritania’s political change and instability during this time.

The search for petroleum

The researcher’s interest in this topic arose out of several decades of engagement in petroleum exploration in Africa and the importance of oil and other ‘natural capital’ in the economic development of several countries, particularly in West Africa. For almost a hundred years, petroleum (and its by-products) has become the cornerstone of modern industrial civilisation and today accounts for 90% of the world’s mineral resource trade by value (Ross, 2012, 8). The global industry has rapidly expanded from sedimentary basins within now-developed consumer countries in the 19th century to increasingly more remote petroliferous basins, many of which are found in developing countries.

Many of these developing and underdeveloped countries have proven to have basins prospective for hydrocarbons, but as the search widens, these countries are progressively more remote from the principal consuming markets geographically, socially and politically. This development has resulted in a number of African countries, including Mauritania, becoming exploration destinations and entering relatively recently into the realm of producers in the quest to fulfil the growing global demand for oil and gas.

In Mauritania, some exploration was undertaken between the late 1960s and 1980s by large oil companies: AGIP, Shell, AMOCO and TEXACO. However, by 1991 petroleum exploration activity in the country had come to a standstill due to disinterest in Mauritania in the foreign investment market. This was a result of ethnically fuelled unrest in the country between 1989 and 1991 (Sy, 2000).

As a maverick pioneer explorer, the researcher had become interested in the economic potential of Mauritania's mineral resources on a first visit in late 1994. By 1995, the researcher had successfully initiated both international interest in the gold potential of Mauritania's Archaean greenstone belts and precipitated a minor diamond exploration rush by majors and junior exploration companies into its diamond-prospective northern regions.

Until 1996, the country had watched several of its North African neighbours with sedimentary basins similar to, and even contiguous to, those present within its borders, gather significant revenues from oil and gas exploration activities and production within their territories. In 1995, as an outcome of the researcher's interest in the development of Mauritania's subsoil natural resources' potential, the authorities granted the researcher's private company, Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd (Elixir), a one-year moratorium on the totality of the oil-prospective Mauritanian coastal basin (Tham 2001, 36). This was to allow the researcher to promote Mauritania and the potential of its hydrocarbon prospectivity to the international petroleum industry without fear of circumvention by a third party for the agreed period.

At first unsuccessful in attracting the attention of the larger international majors, eventually the researcher was able to attract the interest of a small Australian, West Perth-domiciled explorer, Hardman Resources Limited (Hardman, listed on the ASX and at the time valued at AUD 6 million). By mid-1996, Elixir and Hardman had co-signed with the Mauritanian Government on three production sharing contracts, PSCs 3, 4 and 5 (Clarke

2008, 251). All parties understood that as juniors, the joint venturers would not be able to fulfil normal contractual expenditure obligations but would “beat the drum” for the country. The two companies were thus under pressure to bring a cashed-up partner into the venture.

It took almost two years for the Hardman-Elixir Joint Venture to come to the attention of Woodside Petroleum Ltd (Woodside) in early 1998¹. By mid-1998, the Australian “independent” had joint ventured into the project, beginning serious exploration as operator by 1999 and discovering significant hydrocarbons with the first well drilled in late-May 2001. This unprecedented rapid success in the discovery of the Chinguetti oilfield, which was deemed commercially viable after some limited appraisal work in 2001-2003, resulted in development planning and construction beginning in early 2003.

Woodside was at the time, headed by John Akehurst, a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) keen on expanding his company’s asset portfolio internationally and into more liquid hydrocarbons or oil. On Peter Grant’s recommendation, the International Exploration manager at the time, John Akehurst and the New Ventures Director, Agu Kantsler, engineered Woodside’s first significant move overseas with the Hardman-Elixir Mauritanian venture.

On the back of the Chinguetti discovery in May 2001, Woodside acquired further prospective coastal basin acreage for the joint venture², in total covering some 75,000 sq km or some two-thirds of the total then-available offshore acreage. By end-2001 and given technology’s limits at the time, the remainder of the prospective offshore areas to the 2,000 m bathymetric line, as well as its onshore extensions, were granted to some 20 oil companies attracted to the new frontier.

¹ Through the efforts of the then-MD of Hardman Resources Limited, Ted Ellyard

² Petroleum Blocks 2 and 6

Following the Chinguetti oilfield discovery in Mauritania, moreover, some 50 companies ranging from Australian juniors to the largest multinationals and including African national oil companies, sought permits (some successfully and some unsuccessfully) within other basins in Mauritania and surrounding African countries. Their search extended over some 1.5 million sq km underlain by sedimentary sequences previously not considered as hydrocarbon-prospective.

This petroleum rush occurred because Mauritania was especially attractive compared with developed industrialised countries with like-prospectivity and other African states, as its officials were considered more approachable and their terms and regulations much less onerous, reflecting their frontier status. More pertinent, their need for foreign investment, allowed not only large foreign companies but also small pioneer mavericks such as Elixir and Hardman, to negotiate much more favourable terms than in developed countries. Thus, when geological resource potential was confirmed and economic hydrocarbon reserves proved up, as was the case with Chinguetti, a rapid ramp-up of activities could be assured through rapid government approvals, or for smaller companies, little government impediment to the on sale of their remaining portion of projects to larger petroleum players .

After the May 2001 discovery of commercial oil reserves in the Chinguetti oilfield, the long-standing President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya demanded a rushed development program. President Taya required such a success in order to re-energise the economy, but especially in order to sustain his popularity and expand the distribution of rents within the patrimonial patronage system that was the norm in Mauritania. According to Max Weber, patrimonialism refers to a specific type of authority founded on a specific kind of legitimacy organised around the personal power of a ruler and his/her supporters and clients. In a culturally specific context, it does not denote a corrupt regime as defined by western notions of the proper and often idealised

democratic process³. According to Weber (Pitcher, Moran and Johnston 2009, 125-156) patrimonial relations, include notions of reciprocity and voluntary consent and compliance between an elected leader and those that are led⁴.

High and sustained windfall oil-revenues were expected by government, citizens and oil industry companies alike. President Taya was, however, ousted in a successful coup d'état in August 2005, engineered by two of his closest military collaborators, the Head of National Security since 1987, Colonel Ely (Ould)⁵ Mohamed Vall, and the general's cousin, Colonel Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz, Commander of the Presidential Guard.

The timing of previous coup attempts and of the successful coup raises the question of a possible relationship with the discovery of petroleum and the expected windfall revenue stream to the government.

The beginning of oil and minor gas production (First-Oil) was officially announced some six months after the coup on 26 February 2006, during the period of the first military Junta lead by Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, which ruled from August 2005 to March 2007. With First-Oil, came the promise of sustained high flow rates and an expectation of high success rates in future exploration that would generate a very long-term, continuing and growing oil-revenue base for the government. Rich and poor Mauritians mistakenly saw their country's capital as the new African "Dubai", a roadside billboard even going up showing "Nouakchott 2020" with 150-floor glass-and-aluminium

³ Pitcher et al, do point out that "while patrimonialism is said to cement social bonds in small-scale situations through a reliance on trust, reciprocity, and material exchanges, it is however believed to distort power, corrupt authority, and fuel personal aggrandisement when it permeates larger political institutions such as bureaucracies and states" (page 130)

⁴ The present commonly used 'neopatrimonialism' could have been used as it implies the continues existence of pre-modern cultural norms through colonial influences. However, it is avoided as it is presently loosely employed as a handy label by western media, ascribing it to many leaders in present West African states that are suffering economic stagnation or other ills (op. cit.)

⁵ Ould (or Mint) , meaning "son (daughter) of" is a Maure (Bidân and Haratin) way of denoting lineage affiliation, but is being increasingly dropped in recent years as the westernisation of surnames increases, most especially in those exposed to the international scene, such as politicians and businesspersons

skyscrapers in the place of today's dusty and unsealed, garbage-strewn streets and crumbling cement or mud-brick lodgements ⁶.

In beginning to draft up the 2006 annual budget in October 2005, the military Junta discovered what they considered irregularities in amendments to Woodside's PSCs, and an acrimonious period of claims and counterclaims coincided with "First oil" in February 2006.

It is now known that the oil and minor gas drawn from the Chinguetti reservoir was being produced from a much more complex, geological structure than had been anticipated from the seismic work carried out. Thus, the project should optimally have required much greater appraisal work than the simpler, and possibly rushed, program that was carried out. However, with what turned out to be the false promise of long-term sustained high flow rates, the sudden turn of events and the confrontation with the military Junta were a striking disappointment to Woodside and did not auger well for a relationship that had promised so much for all parties.

The dispute continued until end-2006. In late 2006, Woodside, under the leadership of Don Volte, newly appointed as CEO to replace John Akehurst, retracted its claim of legitimacy for PSC amendments that had been agreed with President Taya's overthrown government in 2004 and paid US\$ 100 million to Colonel Mohamed Vall's military junta. In the meantime, after some six months of high oil production flow rates beginning in February 2006, production rapidly dropped to less than a tenth of that predicted and the expected long-term oil-revenue stream to the government began to dry up.

In December 2007, an embittered Woodside eventually sold their Mauritania subsidiary at a book loss of some AUD 233 million to the Malaysian parastatal company Petronas and over the next two years, the Australian independent

⁶ Photo gallery: Photo 1

exited from several more of its African projects to re-concentrate on its Australian gas projects (Woodside 2008, 9).

After the government's loss of the promised revenue stream caused by the unpredicted geological difficulties, a period of social and political instability set in. following a seemingly free and fair presidential election in mid-2007⁷, Mauritania's second elected civilian president, President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, was overthrown after one year in office on 6 August 2008. The perpetrators were military generals he had sacked from government posts the previous day. The coup leaders headed by the (now-General) Mohamed Abdel Aziz claimed that they had overthrown "an authoritarian regime" and set up a military Junta that, at first, received little international support.

Forcing a formal resignation from the ousted civilian president in early 2008, General Abdel Aziz resigned from the military and, donning civilian clothes, contested and won the elections in July 2009, His Maure elite opponents regard this as a constitutional coup d'état, carried off through pandering to popular requests by the poorer Afro-Mauritanian section of the population. Although both international as well as major national support appears to justify Abdel Aziz's continued presidency, many influential political parties eventually coalesced into the Mauritanian Opposition for Democracy (COD)⁸. Notably, several political public personalities also joined the COD: Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, Abdel Aziz's cousin and military Junta leader between 2005 and 2007; the President of the National Assembly, Messaoud Ould Boulkheir; and Ahmed Hamza, influential mayor of Nouakchott. These parties and elites strongly rejected President Abdel Aziz's regime and continue today to call for his resignation (Diagana, 2013).

⁷ According to the CENI, the independent National Electoral Commission, however contested by many of the present research participants who participated as voters and election contenders

⁸ The Mauritanian Opposition for Democracy, which includes notable political elites: Ahmed Ould Daddah (brother of the ex-President, Jemil Mansour, Bab Mamadou Alassane, Mahfoud Ould Bettah and Saleh Ould Hanane

The twenty-one year rule of President Taya, had been dictatorial, and although not marked by generally known coup attempts, had been a period of political instability, notably in view of the racial conflict that erupted in 1989. Following the 2005 coup d'état some six months before First-Oil, the country re-entered a period of recurring coup d'états, political intrigue, ethnic tensions and social upheavals reminiscent of the 1978-1984 period. Contrary to expectation, oil revenues dried up, exploration by foreign companies almost stopped and the global petroleum industry's view of Mauritania soured. It was only in late 2012 that interest in the country's petroleum potential appeared to be recovering with the announcements that Tullow Oil plc was planning an offshore drilling programme and evaluating the development of a small gas discovery for local consumption. The French parastatal company, Total, is also evaluating a potentially significant gas discovery in Mauritania's interior basin, although the harsh environment and present regional instability suggests that any progress to development will be challenging.

Mauritania

Mauritania is located on the northwest Atlantic coast of Africa, south of Morocco and north of Senegal. Its surface area is about a million square kilometres and generally consists of flat, arid plains or low, rolling hills dotted by occasional hardy desert shrubs and crossed by vast complexes of sand dunes covering several hundreds of kilometres and stretching tens of kilometres wide. This sahelian and desert landscape is broken only by spectacular ridges and cliffs that are in places several hundred metres high, and form the edge of the inland Taoudeni Basin⁹.

This harsh, sparsely vegetated land is the traditional domain of nomadic and semi-nomadic Maures, a mixed-ethnic population of Arab, Berber and black African descent. The Maures are historically divided into approximately sixty tribes of interconnected descent groups that had lived a Bedouin-like existence until the severe drought beginning in the late 1960s. During this 10-year

⁹ Photo gallery: Photo 2

drought, possibly up to 95% of the nomadic Maure population migrated to urban centres, rapidly adapting their customs and behaviours to the new environment and lifestyle, moving from tents and camels to houses and four-wheel drive vehicles.

The Senegal River, which forms part of Mauritania's southern frontier, flows within a wide fertile valley. It was and still is traditionally inhabited by sedentary black African settlements of several ethnic affiliations, the principal ones being, Wolof, Peulh, Soninké and Bambara. Historically, interaction between the Maures and the African communities occurred and commercial exchange did take place (Abdoul 2008, 31). However, these relations had principally been of a predatory nature, the nomads periodically descending from the dry north to use the fertile region as a base during the harsher summer seasons, and conducting raids for slaves and goods on the sedentary black settlements of the river valley.

French merchants first established a commercial presence in 1659 at the mouth of the Senegal River. It grew over the years as European demand for Arabic gum, slaves and other goods increased. Black Africans of the Senegal River valley began to be "civilised" through missionary action and were in demand as able and keen workers by the French administrators. Although Christianity failed to make great inroads, education was given to sedentary black African youths that worked within the French realm of government and private activity. Many achieved relatively high office within the administration on the south bank of the Senegal River, in what would become the Republic of Senegal. After the Berlin Conference and the formulation of the Treaty of Berlin in 1885, the French government altered its interaction with the native population and began military occupation of the region, extending activities deep into the desert region to the north and northeast of the fertile Senegal River valley in an effort to subjugate the Maure nomads. Military confrontation continued until 1947, when the last battle was fought between the French colonising forces and the belligerent Bidân tribes of the region north of Tidjikja.

Exhausted after two World Wars, however, the French coloniser and the other Western powers occupying African soil began to relinquish their hold on the African communities. As per the demarcations of the Treaty of Berlin, France increasingly granted independence to regions of the continent under its control, including that today recognised as the Islamic Republic of Mauritania or Mauritania for short.

The borders of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania were officially declared and demarcated at independence by the former colonial powers of the region, Spain and France, on 28 November 1960. As witnessed by the almost straight-line borders, this was done with little concern for cultural, geographic, ethnic or economic realities of the region. The multiple and enduring identities of the ethnicities inhabiting the demarcated area of today's republic and spilling beyond it, have gelled over the centuries with differences further shaped by relationships between them, as well as resulting from contact with neighbours in the newly demarcated independent states around them. Morocco most vociferously objected to Mauritania's independence, until 1969 calling that territory "Greater Morocco", while both Senegal and Mali lost regions, which demographically, should have been demarcated as theirs. The citizens of the new independent state of Mauritania thus lacked a sense of national unity and shared destiny, and people's loyalties and identities continued to be shaped, *inter alia*, by sub-national allegiances.

Today, despite being rich in natural resources, Mauritania has one of the lowest Gross Domestic Products (GDP) rates in Africa. Agriculture and livestock is still at subsistence level, as the vast majority of Maure nomads and many Afro-Mauritanian subsistence farmers from the harsher more marginal regions of the Senegal River valley were forced into the cities by the severe, decade-long drought of the late-1960s.

Mauritania has extensive deposits of iron ore centred at Zouérat in the north of the country, which account for almost 50% of total export revenues. Gold

and copper mining companies opened mines during the resource boom of the early 2000s, but at the time of writing, the longer-term future of these mining projects is not assured. Industrial manufacturing is non-existent, but fishing accounts for some 40% of export revenue and creates some 40,000 jobs, a major source of revenue for the state and elite class (Deida 2013, 88-89). The significant contribution to the small economy of post-colonial Mauritania in the exploitation of its several natural resources, would suggest a fertile ground for the emergence of social inequalities. Moreover, the dependence of Mauritania on these natural resources for its revenue makes it an interesting case on which to study the relationship between political stability and natural resource exploitation.

Available background literature on Mauritania

There is a range of French and English literature on Mauritania, most of which, however, does not deal with the role of natural resources and political change. Moreover, scholarly literature on Mauritania is more readily available in French with relatively few sources in English¹⁰. This French literature contains background information in a variety of areas including sociology, anthropology, history, politics and economics, as well as technical reports and articles dealing with petroleum and Africa. It is extensively, although not exclusively used and English language references on the politics of Mauritania, such as Foster's "Mauritania: The struggle for Democracy" (2011) are also sources used in to the present research.

Although many French sources were acquired and used as reference, one text from which the researcher extracted much information and appreciation of Mauritania was Mariella Villasante de Beauvais's "Parenté et politique en Mauritanie: Essai d'Anthropologie historique" (1998). In this book,

¹⁰ Access to a potentially large source of French literature on Mauritania at the National Library in Paris proved to be difficult. The researcher thus personally acquired available and relevant texts in French in the course of several trips to specialist research bookshops in Paris and Nouakchott. The material acquired in this manner adequately filled the lack of access to more detailed information on the colonial period held in the National Library and the research is believed not to have suffered unduly.

Villasante-de Beauvais highlights the characteristics of the politically dominant white Maure or Bidân society, which makes up some 30% of the population of modern Mauritania. She discusses relevant events of the late 19th to early 20th centuries that influenced the creation of the modern state. Her work also highlights the interaction of the Maure tribal society with the institution of democracy and other modern formal and informal institutions left in place after the colonial era. Her use of the term “tribe” is taken in the context of the Bidân society and is utilised in this sense within the present research. It is a translation of the Arabic word *qabila*, the term used in the same manner as the Maures would use it to describe themselves and their society. Related tribes are sometimes collectively referred to as “super tribes”, and are groups of related individuals linked genealogically, in reality or imagined, who develop exclusionary solidarity tendencies, termed *Assabiya* in Arabic. *Assabiya* expresses itself within the modern political arena with strong solidarity expressed between political elites of related tribes and the grouping together of Maure elites in general in the interest of ensuring Maure political hegemony within Mauritania. Tribal tendencies in the Maure have adapted to the socio-political changes that have historically shaped the population of the region (Villasante de Beauvais 1998, 16).

“L’étrier, la Houe et le Livre: Société traditionnelles au Sahara et au Sahel occidental”, by Francis de Chassey (1993) also provides useful information on traditional Maure society but also covers the traditions of the sedentary Afro-Mauritanian society of the river valley, which he refers to as the “Toucouleur”. The social fault-lines within Mauritanian society are also touched upon in this work.

The main works in French that deal with military rule, commonly termed “The reign of the Colonels”, are Mohamed Lemine Ould Meymoun’s “La Mauritanie entre le pouvoir civil et le pouvoir militaire” (2011), and Isselmou Ould Mohamed’s “La Mauritanie des changements et de la continuité: 1978–2008” (2009). The former is a discussion about the change from civilian to military rule, its various Maure representatives after each overthrow and a

collection of the official presentations and talks given by each presidential leader during their reign. Relations between Mauritania and France, its former colonial master, are acknowledged with the inclusion of several formal presentations by past and present presidents. Ould Mohamed's work on the other hand is wide-ranging, dealing with poverty, resource management and international relations. In the conclusion, he asks whether Mauritania is still on track towards a true democracy. He considers whether the process of democratisation will be hijacked and re-defined in terms of traditional class and ethnic loyalties, something he sees as pushing the country towards further conflict.

Phillipe Marchesin's 2010 re-edition of his seminal "Tribus, ethnies et pouvoir en Mauritanie" provides a political perspective by a non-Mauritanian on the period from 1946 to the late 1980s, but contains no updates in view of the events of 1989-1991. Marchesin considers the binary nature of the modern Mauritanian society in greater depth than does de Chasse, highlighting the dangers of an ethnically fuelled presidential overthrow. He discerns that a presidential overthrow or ethnic fragmentation of the state could have occurred in the 1980s, and outlines conditions that instead would eventually lead to the 1989-1991 ethnic upheavals between tribal Maures and the Afro-Mauritanians.

An analysis of the specific period of ethnic-cum-racial upheaval of the late 1980s and early 1990s is developed by the Afro-Mauritanian, Peulh, ex-army Commander Mahamadou Sy in "L'enfer d'Inal" (2000). Sy, one of the few surviving inmates of the prison of Inal, presents evidence of the involvement of ethnically divisive Baathist foreign influences financing the elements that precipitated the repressive events of the period, a premise widely believed by the Afro-Mauritanian community.

Mohamadou Abdoul's "Democratisation, ethnicité et tribalisme: Jeux identitaires et enjeux politiques en Mauritanie" (2008) delves into the trajectory that democracy has taken in Mauritania. His work deals with the

practice of politicised tribes and the new formulation of ‘lobbies’ and interest groups that he perceives as having grown out of the traditional tribal structure. Abdoul also touches on the Bidân-Haratin dichotomy, the fault-line between Maures and Afro-Mauritanians as well as the continuing attempts at the formulation of an Arabised nation, something that is dividing the population along ethnic-racial lines. Abdoul, also a contributor to “L’ouest saharien: Regards sur la Mauritanie”, emphasises that tribalism is the social practice of the “white” Mauritanian tribes (Bidân), while “observable behaviours” of Afro-Mauritanians (Peulh especially, but also Wolof, Soninké, Bambara, etc) are, as he calls them, “manifestations of an ethnic characteristic”. Abdoul justifies himself by indicating that “cette catégorisation va de soi et est évidente”¹¹ (Abdoul 2008, 33), or in other words, that this is a most practical, accepted and observable means of categorising and recognising individuals and groups. He puts forward that daily life in Mauritania is being governed by tribalistic tendencies of the Maure and the somewhat broader ethnic solidarity of the Afro-Mauritanian, although inter-ethnic conflict among the Afro-Mauritanians does erupt at times depending on particular situations.

The potentially disruptive dichotomy between white Maures or Bidân, and black Maures or Haratin is analysed by El-Arby Ould Saleck in “Les Haratins: Le paysage politique mauritanien” (2003). Saleck’s work is based on the earlier “Noirs et beydanes Mauritaniens: l’école, creuset de la nation?” (Ba, 1993).

Several more works provided a base upon which the present research is grounded. “La Mauritanie contre vents et marées” (2003) is an autobiography by Moktar Ould Daddah which elaborates on the post-colonial formation of the sovereign state and the difficult formative years of the new republic under his presidency until his overthrow in July 1978. His widow, a passionate political activist pushing for the eradication of poverty and discrimination in

¹¹ “... This classification is self-evident...” (researcher’s translation)

Mauritania, was met and interviewed by the researcher in November 2011, but she declined to be an active participant in the present research

“Les trajectoires d’un état-frontière”, (2004) edited by Prof. Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem is a collection of academic papers on the political evolution and the changing social context of Mauritania as it has evolved until the time of writing. Professor Ould Ahmed Salem was one of the most informative participants in the present research, throwing light on several aspects of Mauritania’s societal complexities, including the relation of his tribe, the Smacides, to the political power struggles that occurred between 2001 and 2011.

Lastly, “Où va la Mauritanie” (2008) by ex-Minister Abdelkader Isselmou constitutes a critical evaluation of Mauritania’s path to an unpredictable future. Isselmou is also a most prominent participant in the present research. He offered insight into the recorded discussions that form a vital part of the research, decisive moments of the “Woodside Affair”, and Mauritania’s historical legacy in the context of contemporary Mauritania.

The “Oil Curse”

The oil curse hypothesis, especially as applied to Africa, refers to the apparent paradox that those countries with an abundance of natural resources, particularly more abundant point-source non-renewable resources such as petroleum (oil and/or gas) or minerals, tend to have economic growth stifled and political stability shaken after production starts and windfall revenues begin to flow (Campbell 2009, Clarke 2007, Clarke 2008, Collier 2007, Ghazvinian 2007, Humphreys, Sachs and Stiglitz 2007, Nhema and Zeleza 2008, Soares de Oliveira 2007, Shaxson 2007a and 2007b). Thus, for resource-rich African countries, the results that emerge out of resource wealth are worse economic, social, political and security development outcomes – or a combination of these – than in countries with fewer natural resources.

In addition to reduced economic growth, other purported effects of the “oil curse” include: poor governance, a decline in trust between the government and the population, erosion of the rule of law, corruption, rent-seeking; an intensified struggle for control of political leadership, a lack of diversification of industries and the crowding out of investment in human capital (Campbell op. cit., and Clarke 2008, 524-541).

However, blaming petroleum for the social, economic and political and security ills that befall a country, especially in Africa, has, in the words of petroleum economist, Duncan Clarke (op. cit, 4) become “ultra-fashionable” and professed by writers who have “composed from afar, without...[their] feet getting too wet on the ground” (op. cit, 36). Clarke ascertains that this blame-game, however, brings no real solution to the issues at hand for Mauritania, or indeed those faced by other African countries that are finding themselves on a similarly troubled development path. The argument adds to the on-going debate in both scholarly and policy literature on resource endowments and economic and political stability.

Rather than further discussing the oil curse here, the different considerations that the hypothesis takes are more deeply examined in a later chapter dealing with the relevant literature. This is done once the historical background of Mauritania has been exposed and the time of the discovery of petroleum has been reached. The various arguments on the oil curse and the evolution of this hypothesis are examined with emphasis given to the complex relationship between political instability and resource-endowment.

The review illustrates that the approaches, purely economic, then social and contextual, to the most recent global and encompassing discussions that review international interrelationships and influences, were each appropriate for their time.

Today’s proponents, and the avenue that the present research adheres to, appropriately views political instability in a global context, proposing international interference plays a major role in the political instability of

resource-rich developing countries. As an outcome of this latest development in the resource or oil curse thesis, the realisation transpires that the sovereignty of states is not the sacrosanct edifice that the builders of nations had originally intended.

The Research Question

In the light of current debates about resource endowments and political stability, the principle research question is as follows: What role, if any, has the development of the petroleum industry played in the heightened political instability and related social and political effects that have characterised Mauritania from 2001 to the present?

This thesis specifically examines the possible link between the emerging petroleum industry in Mauritania and the occurrence of various coup d'états that occurred between May 2001 (the time of oil discovery in offshore Mauritania) and 2011. The thesis also tentatively addresses the significance of continuing socio-political disruptions up to the time of writing (mid-2013). The conclusion drawn from the present research is that, while the discovery of oil may have played some role in heightened ethnic and political instability in Mauritania, such instability was largely the result of a complex set of interrelated historical and contemporary causes related to a range of problems facing the country. These include an institutional system of rent-seeking and the unequal distribution of power, pre-oil uneven patterns of economic and social development, sub-national loyalties and interest coalitions competing for power and resources, a limited development of representative and transparent institutions of governance, Mauritania's place within West African regional politics, and continued foreign interference, principally from France. It is argued that the discovery of oil in 2001 and the development of a petroleum industry in 2005, acted as a minor precipitant to the re-emergence of political rivalry centred on ethnic/racial structures of long-standing. In particular, inter-tribal Bidân political rivalries, with deep historical roots, manifested themselves in other ways until the discovery of oil, and were the key catalyst to the socio-political upheavals in Mauritania between 2001 and

2011. Initially, the discovery of oil encouraged rent seeking by various Maure tribal groups but this was cut short by the failure of the industry to deliver the promised windfall revenue stream. The loss of revenue, nevertheless, did not result in any decline in inter-tribal Maure rivalry, nor in the potential for ethnic upheavals, which continue to manifest themselves in many ways.

The research is guided by the following specific objectives:

- To provide an historical background relevant to an understanding of the present-day social, political and economic development of Mauritania.
- To examine the theoretical and empirical literature on what has become known as the theory of the “Oil Curse” in Africa and its relevance for Mauritania;
- To analyse the complex relations of the country’s political and ethnic elites over the period 2001 to 2011, and determine the influence they have had on Mauritanian’s nascent petroleum industry. The effect of the emergence of political upheavals on the industry’s development is examined, as well as the effect of the petroleum industry, in its turn, on the political landscape of Mauritania.

The thesis points away from the petroleum industry and towards socio-political events of an ethnic nature with some outside interference. However, Mauritania’s ethnic and racial fault-lines manifest themselves in a wide variety of ways, including struggles over control of the revenues of the state. The windfall revenues that may be generated if the petroleum industry does grow in the future will undoubtedly play some role in the country’s politics but as one component of a wider political economy of resource appropriation and distribution.

Participants and Researcher

The researcher has had extensive and close contact with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania over some twenty years¹². Although an Arabic dialect, Hassaniya, is the official language of Mauritania, French is a common language spoken by Maures and Afro-Mauritanians alike. The researcher is fluent in French, which allowed him to participate in the specific cultural context of the study. Advantageous to the present research were the researcher's advanced linguistic ability, mature age, and affable personality, depth of previous in-country experience, multicultural background and high level of sensitivity towards local people. As a result, much of the knowledge of the history, social context and political landscape that are referred to in this thesis was absorbed over the researcher's twenty years of exposure, and through long discussions over those years with Mauritanian academics, politicians and citizens from all occupations.

Where appropriate or specifically relevant, the source of specific information or opinion is acknowledged. Where historical facts are evident or common knowledge, they are introduced without acknowledgement of the source. The information used includes that exchanged in the course of the interviews carried out with participants in this research. As above, where appropriate or specifically relevant, information is included as referenced quotes from individual participants. This is done especially where the participant was observed to place specific emphasis on events and situations that have given shape to both Mauritanians' worldviews, and/or outsiders' views of Mauritania, as with the quotes at the beginning of this thesis.

A review of the most relevant work done by academics on Mauritania and the "oil curse" was carried out in order to come to a broad understanding of the research question. These sources were approached with a critical eye to how much theoretical clarity and coherence they demonstrated, the extent to which

¹² In 2006, the researcher was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of National Merit of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in recognition of his contribution to establishing the petroleum and mining industry. It was at the time the second such award, the first having been granted many years before to President Charles de Gaulle.

they are based on actual fieldwork in Mauritania, and the particular standpoints of the authors and how these shaped the conclusions reached.

In the current study, significant weight is given to qualitative analysis of primary sources, that is, interviews conducted over the course of 2011 and 2012 with participants in Mauritania's recent history¹³. These participants were the real actors and first-hand witnesses in the conflicts of Mauritania, people that are often not considered in social science research because "indigenes" are believed "not to generally produce documents or to refuse to give testimonies of their experiences" to an "outsider" researcher (Bwenge 2005, 97). The use of interviews enables the best possible access to voices with the greatest contextual knowledge of particular events being researched. Moreover, interviews enable active and influential as well as passive actors involved in socio-political situations and events to have a voice that "has been traditionally bypassed [in Africa] and ignored in the production of knowledge about [African] societies" (Osaghae and Robinson 2005, 4).

Difficulties were at first experienced in obtaining the cooperation of Mauritians of one ethnic group or another, but especially that of the Bidân. In studies such as this, "indigenous" participants often view a researcher's questions as a threat and this would be especially true in this case, of participants who had been important actors in shaping the events that shook Mauritania between 1989 and 1991. For some participants, giving their version of events can feel like a betrayal of the "clique", or they might view questions as an intrusion on personal privacy (Bwenge 2005, 96-98). In the current study, the researcher's familiarity with Mauritania and Mauritians alike, helped to lessen such objections. Thus, it has been possible to portray the evolving character of Mauritanian society through the voices of its principal actors; actors that have been instrumental in shaping today's Mauritania.

¹³ A list of the participants is presented after the references

Preoccupation with “objectivity” often causes researchers to seek “objective facts” in order to explain Africa’s conflicts. However, the “study of facts as if they were things” undermines the reality that, “on the ground”, participants’ worldviews or beliefs about facts, especially those of powerful people, often matter far more than the “raw facts” themselves. These beliefs may become catalysts for conflict in their own right. For example, “ethnicity”, engendering feelings of belonging and exclusion, can give rise to passions, emotions, instincts and rancour, but these are not often taken into account because of the academic’s wish to remain scientific (Bwenge 2005, 96). The present research thus focuses on the beliefs and actions of the more powerful members of Mauritanian society in order to draw out differing viewpoints and evaluate the capacity of these elites to mobilise support for their viewpoints to create the perceived realities “on the ground”. The emotional, spontaneous and intuitive expressions of minor and passive actors have also been used in the present research. These are views that in the past had held lesser validity with outside researchers (Smyth 2005, 18), but which today are being used much more frequently to offer real-world solutions to social problems lying at the root of the conflicts being researched (Bwenge 2005, 90-109). Complementary to Foster (2011), the present study is one of the first, to draw on first-hand accounts of political and social events during the period of interest.

Sklar (1993, 83-87) points out political elites of traditional African nations involved in certain situations have often been ignored by researchers who were examining these African states. Bank and Bank (2013) likewise emphasises that there is a need to carry out research “at the ground level” and to come to terms with the contribution of the ordinary Africans and their worldviews (Bank 2013, 68).

Voice is thus given in the present research to principal as well as minor actors that have played both active and passive roles in the events that are the subject of this academic enquiry on Mauritania. It relies heavily on participant narratives in the course of structured and unstructured interviews as a primary source of evidence. The interviews allowed participants to speak about their

own experiences in events that were directly related to the coups or past events when felt to be relevant to the question at hand. Thus, while still referring to important texts and documentation, the emphasis of the present research has as its primary concern, an attempt to bring an understanding of the events that occurred between 2001 and 2011 through some of the very Mauritanian actors that were involved with the social events and political moves that occurred during these years.

These participant voices give ‘knowledge of Mauritania produced by Mauritians’, although it is recognised that any account is partial, including that of the researcher. The partiality of viewpoints means that participants, including members of the political elite, can be blind or unwilling to deal with or confront certain aspects of their societies or events that had occurred. This can be the result of participants having been too close to a particular event or situation they were describing; a lack of interest or curiosity; or in some cases, a sense of hopelessness and even anger as a result of the event. In some emotionally charged interview situations, the researcher sought to probe particular events with caution and to allow participants to express their views without unnecessary interference. Emotionally charged responses, nevertheless, should not be interpreted as somehow more biased or less authentic than those elicited in what may be interpreted as a more calm and rational context. The particular nature of responses to questions meant that the researcher compared responses across a range of participants to seek out consistencies and patterns. If multiple sources agreed or where diverse opinions could be explained, the information was used as supporting evidence.

It is also understood, that the researcher’s attitude and standpoint may themselves have generated *a priori* conclusions and filtered data, finding supporting arguments to strengthen preferred claims¹⁴. This is inevitable as the researcher himself has his personal worldview, participating as a significant actor in the very industry of exploration for petroleum being

¹⁴ A claim levelled at the researcher because he is a geologist and a petroleum entrepreneur

investigated and having a personal involvement in the economic and socio-political fabric of the country through his business activity. Effort was made to minimise bias in reporting interviews, supplying data, or in prejudicing the selection of participants who held differing views to those of the researcher.

The researcher attempted to include in the interviewing, as wide a range of participants as possible so they reflected the known composition of the general Mauritania population (30% Bidân, 30% Afro-Mauritanian and 40% Haratin). The interviews were carried out in as uniform a manner as possible. Significantly, the information collected consisted of some 1.2 million KB of transcribed information that was subject to a qualitative analysis using the computer-assisted software package, NVivo-9.

Methodology

The method used was qualitative and based on primary field research carried out in 2011-2012. The fieldwork primarily consisted of 53 one-on-one interviews with dominantly male Mauritians and participants in the petroleum industry that were both passive and active actors in the establishment of the industry in Mauritania between 2001 and 2011. The selection process is discussed in detail in the next chapter. In addition, articles from Mauritanian daily newspapers and online news websites, and secondary academic and popular literature covering the period 2001 to early 2014 at time of writing were also used.

The primary research question is explored by first providing an historical background to the emergence of Mauritania as a complex multi-ethnic society. The narrative goes back to prehistory to show the arrival into the region of the various ethnic groups present today, the crystallisation of the ethnic entities and moves on to the formation of the independent state of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the socio-political upheavals that have marked the evolution of the state to date. The purpose of examining the historical aspect of the research question is to focus the research on three variables, which are considered of prime importance. The first is the development and parallel

evolution of formal institutions, such as the western-imposed government and the army, together with the institutions of ethnicity and tribalism with their roots in the pre-colonial past. A second variable is the historically constructed social and political context that shaped the actions of elites and actors in the events that mark the period 2001 to 2011. The third variable is that of the ways in which the formal and informal institutions of governance, rooted in the historic fabric of a complex society, shaped the development of the new state, and helped frame the actions and choices of active and passive players alike.

Significance

The significance of the present research is threefold. It will contribute to a general understanding of the causes of political conflict and conflict resolution in resource-dependent African countries. It will provide new empirical material on the relationship between resource dependency, economic growth and political and economic instability.

Lastly, it contributes to the wider policy debates on how best to manage natural resources development planning in order to ensure balanced economic outcomes for developing countries in Africa and elsewhere with similar social and political environments to that of Mauritania.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 outlines the research methodology and expands on the choice of research design. The evolving nature of interview methods and questions is discussed and key participants are presented.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the historical trajectory of Mauritania from a prehistoric sparsely populated land to a region that has served as a crossroads and a final migratory destination for several groups of ethnically diverse peoples, including black Africans from the southeast, Arabic tribes from the Far East, Berber migrations from the north, and finally French colonialists. The French, after only a brief military colonial expansion into West Africa, were forced to abandon their imperial possession after WWII. This retirement

from active and formal governance was replaced by a new political economic relationship that allowed the former colonial master to continue to play a major role in the country's political and economic development from independence until the nascence of the petroleum industry today.

Concentrating on the petroleum industry, Chapter 5 examines the varying interpretations that various commentators have given to the effects of the establishment of such a natural resource industry in an underdeveloped African country. Academic debates over the concept of the "Oil Curse" are examined. The chapter argues that resource endowment and development and topically petroleum endowment, played a less important role in Mauritania's development than some versions of the "oil curse" thesis would assert. It gives greater weight to wider sub-national, national and international social, economic and political processes in shaping leadership's behaviour and decisions. Chapter 6 specifically examines the relevance of the "oil curse" theme to Mauritania.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, summarises the main findings of the research, discusses the contribution they make to the relationship between political change and natural resource development, and the practical policy implications of this relationship for the future development of the country's oil and mineral wealth. The thesis closes with proposed avenues for future research, paying particular attention to the need for research on the wider civil society and the problems of poverty, unemployment, ethnicity, marginalisation and discrimination, problems affecting Mauritania as well as other oil-rich underdeveloped countries with similar socio-political landscapes.

Chapter 2 – Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology and explains the choice of research design and methods used in the study.

In order to meet the research objectives within a set time and situational limitations, the design and implementation of the fieldwork research is qualitative. This method is suited to the social and cultural environment of Mauritania and to the time and personal financial resources available for the project.

The qualitative nature of the project involved extensive interviews with people of diverse ethnic, economic and political backgrounds. Gaining access to such people took time, patience and the use of personal networks. The researcher's long association with Mauritania allowed privileged access to selected participants, including many past and present senior government officials associated with the 2005 military Junta. Many of the selected participants, and particularly high office holders and Bidân elites, were chosen because they were in a particular situation, or of a particular group, that gave them a vantage point that allowed them to be the most knowledgeable about a particular issue or event. The researcher was also able to interview a sample of Mauritians of diverse ethnic background and social class from the wider civil society. This was achieved through the researcher's personal networks built up over some twenty years. The researchers' familiarity with Mauritanian society allowed him to move relatively freely in particular private and public spaces. In the remainder of the chapter, the research site, recruitment and sampling procedures are discussed, including the steps taken to ensure quality, validity and reliability of data collection and processing. Both university protocols as well as local-situational ethical considerations to do with research in an Islamic country, guided the present study.

Research method

As advocated by Malinowski (1922), the research approach is to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world”¹⁵. For the present research, it meant bringing out a range of Mauritians’ conceptions of key events and situations that surrounded the establishment of the petroleum industry and link those views to past events and developments in the country. Participant interviews were carried out in French, a commonly spoken language in Mauritania across the many ethnic communities of the country. For the majority of participants, French was their second language. This meant that interviews were recorded and then transcribed, translating selected passages into English text for inclusion in this thesis. Interviews were transcribed in most cases verbatim and little paraphrasing was used. This brought out the personalised meanings of events and situations, as conceptualised and interpreted in the mind of participants.

The researcher carried out interviews in a variety of settings, including the home or garden of the participant¹⁶, the garden of the hotel residence in Nouakchott, and the street¹⁷.

Participants were asked a range of questions relating to the current political situation in the country and the earlier development of the petroleum industry from 2001 to the present. To this end, the appropriate data collection strategies, adapted to the environmental constraints of Mauritania, were at first conducted through structured interviews and a standard set of questions for which specific answers were recorded. As the questioning was carried out during the first field research period between March and June 2011, including a short pilot-study in Mali, the formal questionnaire¹⁸ was successively adapted to allow for more open-ended participant responses. Participants reacted in a more informal and open manner, sometimes speaking at length,

¹⁵ Note that Malinowski only interviewed males. Restrictions on relations between women and unrelated men are strong in Mauritanian society, although this varies across ethnic groups. It was thus decided to focus on male respondents, as they were the key actors during the period covered by this research.

¹⁶ Photo gallery: Photo 3

¹⁷ Photo gallery: Photo 4

¹⁸ Appendix 1

when dealing with particular questions with which they showed more familiarity or in which they saw themselves as being more involved¹⁹. As the method of interviewing changed over time from relatively structured questions to questions of a more open-ended nature, it allowed the researcher to probe more deeply into the participants' views²⁰, and particularly concerning important events in Mauritania's past.

This necessary incremental change in interview style required flexibility and adaptability in response to participant-researcher interactions and exposure to participants' multiple perspectives²¹. The interviews, dependent on participants' knowledge but also on their comprehension and verbal skills, rapidly became open, in-depth discussions on specific social, political and economic aspects of Mauritania tailored to the participants' worldviews. Three Afro-Mauritanian women out of 53 participants were interviewed, reflecting the patriarchal and male-dominated structure of Mauritanian society. The only Bidân woman to be heard in the course of this research is the wife of Mr Dahi, Chief of Cabinet of Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall and long-standing lawmaker in Mauritania. Cutting into an interview with her husband conducted over a Maure meal at his residence, a meal that was untraditional in that she and their daughter were present, her blunt and clear accusations that Woodside "had done wrong to the community in departing from Mauritania" was in contrast to his measured responses.

Following the initial research-specific visit to Mauritania between March and June 2011 in which a majority of Afro-Mauritanians were interviewed, the later visit to Nouakchott between November 2011 and January 2012 involved mostly Bidân and Haratin participants.

As the field research advanced and interviews with Bidân, Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians began to be reviewed in the field, it became clear that each

¹⁹ Photo gallery: Photo 5

²⁰ Contrast here Appendix 1 and Appendix 2

²¹ Photo gallery: Photo 6, 7, 8

individual participant's worldview was grounded in the historical events that long preceded the advent of the petroleum industry in 2001. The investigative approach thus required a multidisciplinary stance involving aspects of history, anthropology, sociology, politics and economics.

There were occasions when participants avoided answering some questions. This was respected but raised in the researcher's mind new questions about why this had occurred. One way in which the researcher dealt with this was to listen to other people's accounts or views in order to try to ascertain indirectly something about why some participants refused to answer certain questions. Another approach was to rephrase the question and approach it less directly to allow an answer of a more general nature²². The most delicate issue related to the period of government-sanctioned ethnic conflict between 1989 and 1991. When questioned, all Bidân without exception and most Afro-Mauritians grew silent and unresponsive. This sensitive subject had touched most Mauritians and the researcher avoided asking direct questions on the imprisonment and torture of Afro-Mauritians by the Bidân government at Inal. Other issues that proved sensitive were ethnic disparity in government postings, as well as slavery in general. This was especially so with the often opulently wealthy Bidân who welcomed me into their luxurious homes and, on hearing my questions, felt a level of unease about the dozens of poorly-dressed black "servants" that tended to their white families and dwellings. An issue that also proved to be sensitive with Bidân was the presence of terrorists on Mauritanian soil. Nevertheless, Mohamed Fall Ould Bah²³ did invite the researcher to take part in a presentation by invitation only on the development of terrorism in West Africa. In addition, the meaning of the Arab Spring for Mauritania was discussed and delivered by Jean-Pierre Filiu, a French political writer and commentator, (Filiu, 2009 and 2011).

²² Photo gallery: Photo 9

²³ Well-read Bidân accountant interviewed 12 December 2011 (interview 32A) who had completed a doctorate through a French university in 2010 and published a book from his research on banking practices in the Islamic republic of Mauritania

In addition, other methods of data collection were adopted including reference to standard historical studies of Mauritanian and West Africa. Information dealing with Mauritania's pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary history was obtained from standard historical studies of Mauritania and of West Africa and from particular recordings of public speeches by political orators such as President Moktar Ould Daddah, President Mitterrand and President Giscard d'Estaing, and contemporaneous political campaigners such as Messaoud Ould Boulkheir and Biram (Ould) Dah (Ould) Abeid²⁴. Other sources were radio programmes and opportunistically recorded snatches of conversations with members of the Mauritanian community. Importantly, various printed newspapers and magazine articles were collected over the period November 2010 to September 2013, while pertinent online press articles were collected in the course of almost daily access to Mauritanian news websites over the period 2010 to 2013. In addition, the researcher was able to view, and in one case acquire government documents and company-approved transcripts that shed light on certain aspects of the core research questions.

In choosing the data collection strategies, the informative and organisational value, the financial cost and the ethical content of the data had to be evaluated. Accordingly, some data was discarded as inappropriate or it remained as background information to the arguments presented. This was the case for example with an invitation to participate in a meeting of a dissident group, following an interview with a member of the "Mouvement du 25 février"²⁵. It may have added information to the research, especially regarding contemporary political activities in the capital, Nouakchott. However, the researcher did not attend this meeting because it involved interactions with active political dissidents operating in an autocratic military regime and presented a personal security risk for the researcher as well as potentially compromising his access to mainstream politicians.

²⁴ Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid received the UN Human Rights Award on 6 December 2013 for his efforts in denouncing the continuation of slavery in Mauritania (Ait Akdim 2013, 17), .

²⁵ Photo gallery: Photo 9

As a former player in the establishment of the petroleum industry in Mauritania, the researcher was conscious of the need to avoid bringing a predetermined set of perceptions and underlying beliefs to the research process. Although information was sought on the “Mouvement du 25 février”, no reliable published information or written works expressing the views of this political movement could be accessed on the worldwide web. Refusal to attend the “25 février” meeting may indeed represent a bias in sampling by the researcher, but ethical and strategic reasons prevailed. The researcher, nevertheless, attempted to offset and mitigate this effect by seeking responses from as wide a variety of individuals as possible. The researcher managed to gather over a hundred personal interviews with individuals that included a Hartani night watchman, the Junta leader Ely Mohamed Vall, who led the military government between 2005 and 2007, and many others at intermediate levels in the socio-economic structure of Mauritania. The interviews obtained are considered to have captured a wide cross-section of Mauritanian citizens.

Research design

Throughout the period of field data collection, the researcher attempted to avoid personal engagement with participants known for almost two decades. Nevertheless, a beneficial result of familiarity with the researcher was that a number of participants opened up in conversations about certain aspects of their daily lives, as they would have rarely done with strangers. One participant in particular²⁶, a close friend of the researcher, provided revealing information about historical interactions between Afro-Mauritanians and Maures.

²⁶ M’Boye Ould Arafa was the Director General of the Department of Geology, Mines and Energy at the time of the researcher’s first visit to Mauritania in 1994-1995. He was responsible for getting the researcher interested in evaluating the petroleum prospectivity of the offshore of Mauritania and facilitating the start of the petroleum industry for his country. Because of personal vendettas and political manoeuvring, he remains unrecognised and unrewarded for his efforts to this day. He is a Torkoz Bidân, whose parents migrated to the Tagant region and were integrated into the Idaouali Tribe.

It was made clear at the beginning of each interview that the researcher sought to be impartial. Each participant was informed at the beginning of an interview that the use of the participant's name in this thesis and any subsequent publications would only be used with his or her permission. Each participant was informed that withdrawal from the research was possible at any time during the interview or in later encounters until April 2013, when the drafting of the research document began, and that access to the recorded information was open only to the researcher and his supervisor until 2019. Almost all potential participants agreed to participate further.

The first meeting with all participants consisted of presenting the authorisation and explanatory forms requested by Curtin University²⁷, including the application for ethical approval to show that this university-backed research project was for educational purposes only. Then the formal two-page personal questionnaire was completed. This introductory part of the interview lasted some fifteen minutes. In the course of the fourth interview it was realised that much recording time and therefore material to be later transcribed was generated which added little value to the research. This portion of interviews was thus not recorded in subsequent meetings.

Group interviews were also attempted following some success in the pilot study conducted in Mali, which involved at least one paid research assistant who acted as witness²⁸. However, most Mauritanian participants preferred to conduct their interviews on a one-on-one basis with no witness taking any direct part in the session²⁹. Several participants, primarily because of their deep involvement in the issues discussed, were willing to pass long hours answering questions or expanding on certain topics close to their heart, even at all hours of the day or night. A number were willing to meet again for more

²⁷ Appendix 3 and 4

²⁸ Photo gallery: Photo 10

²⁹ This may reflect the strong Mauritanian character of distrust of "the other", an element of their worldview, possibly evolved from living in the Sahara desert in a frugal and frontier manner

than one session, allowing the interactive sessions to develop from merely answering the formal questionnaire into ongoing in-depth personal conversations around sensitive topics.

Field interviews

The sample of selected participants was intended to draw broad and valid conclusions concerning the worldviews of the larger Mauritanian population from a qualitative viewpoint. As “saturation point” was achieved in the answers received to the key topics, the number of participants, 53, was considered representative of the general Mauritanian population and their differing worldviews, for the depth of inquiry required of this project.

Two periods of four weeks and eleven weeks were spent in the field, gathering information from a diverse range of individuals to saturation point – that is, until recounted experiences and stories were repeated and similar answers to standard questions began to be recorded.

The approach allowed each participant to provide a personal sketch of Mauritania as the participant perceived it. It allowed the mapping of diverse responses to the socio-political events that occurred around them, and in which they were, at times, deeply involved. Qualitative analytical methods were used to tease out answers to the research questions through integrating related sets of participants’ verbal, and at times non-verbal, responses.

Pilot Study: Bamako, Mali - 11 to 31 March 2011

Prior to going to Mauritania, three weeks were spent between 11 March 2011 and 31 March 2011 in Bamako, the capital of nearby Mali. The purpose was primarily to use a similar socio-political environment to test the appropriateness of the research approach to be used in Mauritania.

The trial interviews in Mali were officially approved by the government and were designed as a pilot study to evaluate the validity of the group

participation and the one-on-one interview approaches as means of eliciting relevant information from willing participants in this African setting.

Importantly, the pilot study was used to evaluate the feasibility of acquiring a significant number of participants willing to be interviewed, through a combination of opportunistic, convenience, referral and judgemental sampling procedures. In this sampling approach, members of a population were at first chosen based on their relative ease of access. For instance, hotel employees known for many years were interviewed, followed by subsequent referral sampling, where further interview participants referred were judged and chosen for their appropriateness or usefulness or expertise in providing specific information relevant to the research.

The combined sampling techniques are all considered non-probabilistic, in that they do not meet the criteria of the sample being representative, in mathematical terms, of the “whole population”. However, the sampling techniques used – opportunistic, convenience, referral and judgmental – selected participants that did provide information from differing points of view and from different social backgrounds in the society. This procedure is appropriate where a sample deemed statistically representative of the population is impossible or inappropriate to access due to any number of reasons, including cultural constraints, problems of determining the base populations for sampling, financial consideration, and where access to individuals is difficult due to security concerns.

The sampling techniques tested in Mali and subsequently used in Mauritania, were rooted in the researcher’s long relationships with people from diverse occupations and lifestyles in both countries. In the course of the pilot study in Bamako, the researcher opportunistically selected initial willing participants. They were hotel employees known over many years, who in turn recruited further participants from among their social contacts³⁰. For example, after

³⁰ Photo gallery: Photos 6

having discussed the pilot project with and interviewed Mr Demba Sidibé, the hotel manager at a Bamako hotel, it was subsequently possible to interview some twenty members of his Malian staff chosen for their diverse ethnic origins. This sample included Mme Sallama Konaté, the PR Manager, who was then herself influential in convincing her uncle, Dr Ba, President of the National Assembly, to be interviewed on several occasions.

The first interview with Dr Ba was in a formal sitting in the hotel lobby, where he answered the first-draft formal questionnaire list. Subsequently, Dr Ba consented to be interviewed and for audio recordings to be made on specific sensitive aspects of the socio-political environment of Mali.

Adopting such a contingent approach to sampling facilitated the development of the research agenda in both the pilot study in Mali and research in Mauritania, and the appropriate level of participant involvement and diversity was achieved. In the course of the Malian pilot study, it was found that modifications to questions and methods of interviewing were required. In particular, religious devoutness, ethnic affiliation, socio-economic status and political conviction had to be given greater consideration since they all played a vital part in the way the questionnaire was presented.

It was only on rare occasions that any approach solicited a negative response and a refusal to participate.

The researcher changed styles of interview as well as the types of questions, depending upon participants' socio-economic status, ethnic characteristics and "proximity" (having a pre-existing personal relationship with the researcher).

The pilot study verified that open questions were less productive with participants of lower socio-economic standing, in spite of a long acquaintance with the researcher. This was due to a lack of knowledge of particular events or issues as well as unfamiliarity with the purpose and practices involved in interviewing. Such participants were generally unable to express themselves

fully or required much prompting to arrive at an answer. The formal questionnaire approach was retained for these participants.

The use of open questions was adopted much more widely in the latter stage of the field research periods when a greater number of educated Bidân were interviewed. This approach was effective especially with better-known participants and elicited specific and detailed information on sensitive topics from higher-level public servants, professionals as well as privileged Mauritanian Bidân elites. It was also used on occasions to gauge the level of engagement and truthfulness of participants, especially when posing open-ended questions touching on events that had affected the individual or his family. For example, in Mauritania, the events of 1989 were discussed with various Peulh participants, each participant giving an answer dependent on his or her rational-emotional approach to the events and their experiences, including on rare occasions pure fabrication. Deliberate lying and fabrication of events and experiences were identified by cross-referencing the information given by one participant and comparing it to information given by like-participants that had shared the same experience. Although at times difficult to filter from accounts by participants recounting information from their own frame of reference, such deliberate lies were detected on two distinct occasions and the participants discounted as reliable sources.

The non-probabilistic techniques used – judgmental, opportunistic and referral sampling – are sampling methods used often by researchers in social sciences that approach an inquiry qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The present research suggests that it was possible to construct reliable evaluations of situations and events from information gathered in the interviews by such sampling techniques (a small sample relative to a whole population). The information gathered was appropriate to elucidate specific avenues of inquiry, despite the complex socio-political network that weaves through the heterogeneous African populations of Mali and, most importantly for this research, Mauritania. The approach adopted enabled inferences and

extrapolations to be made, even though there are limitations in generalising the findings to the whole population.

In summary, the three-week pilot study in Bamako enabled the researcher to do the following:

- Develop interview techniques,
- Alter, change the order or simply remove questions designed in the first-pass questionnaire composed in Perth,
- Discern where questions could be asked in different ways,
- Gauge the speed at which questions should be put,
- Regulate the level of empathy or engagement shown towards participants.

The opportunistic approach used in soliciting participants in the street of Nouakchott, brought some good results, leading for example, to the identification and interviewing of several individuals, including an extremely knowledgeable small grocery-shop owner, Mohamed Lemine Ould Abdallah³¹. Ould Abdallah had undertaken postgraduate engineering studies while self-exiled in Italy as an active political dissident. On returning to Mauritania in 2010, he had become a member of the movement, “25 février” and was, at the time of meeting, an active anti-government, political agitator.

³¹ Interview 50A, conducted in his shop on 2 January 2012. Also see Photo 9

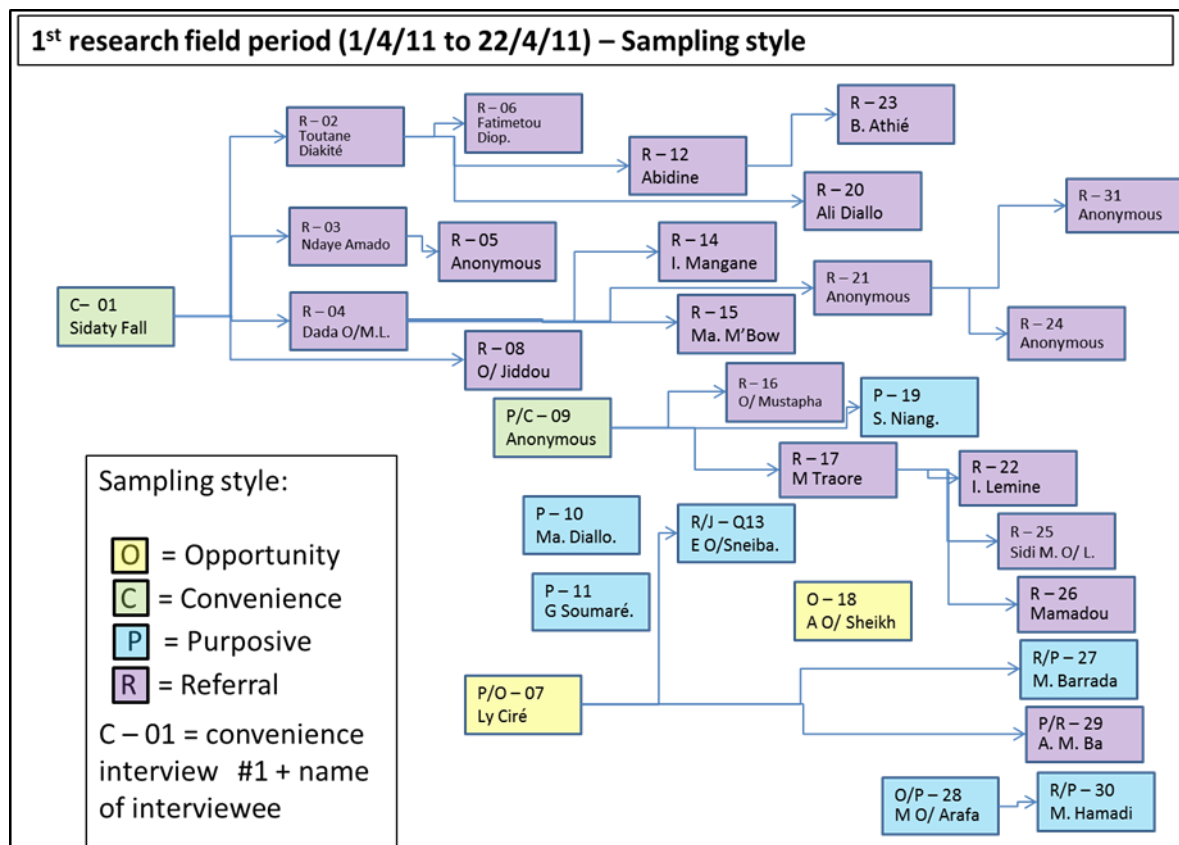


Fig 2-1 Sampling style adopted during the first Mauritanian field period, 1-22 April 2011

A small number of participants gave unreliable or fabricated answers to certain questions. This seemed to be because they felt such questions were socially, religiously or politically sensitive in nature. As the researcher became more experienced in interviewing, these lapses in the veracity of answers could be quickly discerned in the course of an interview and verification done immediately. If the particular question was believed not to transgress cultural sensitivities, it was repeated or rephrased as the interview progressed. In the case of two of the participants, the purpose of the exaggerations was later found simply to be the hope of personal monetary gain and their testimonies were rejected.

It is, nevertheless, important to remember that each person constructs his or her own perceived reality of the world. Therefore, the story of each participant was examined and where appropriate, reasons were advanced for the unique

way in which the individual represented his or her “worldview”. In several instances, information that at first appeared contradictory, on closer examination was validated for a particular segment of the population and retained.

Language

The national language of Mauritania is the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic with several other ethnic languages recognised as national languages, including Pulaar, Soninké, Wolof and Serer. Imraguen is spoken by several small communities to the north of Nouakchott on the Atlantic coast, but it is not used outside the Imraguen villages.

French is widely used as a common *lingua franca* for business and communication between ethnic groups, but its use is widely contested – in French – by Hassaniya speakers. Government-ordained education systems have seesawed between Arabic and French, and this has affected the country’s language over the last several decades. Many of the educated class also speak one of several other foreign languages, notably English, Russian or Romanian. Many Bidân traders speak Spanish or Italian and more rarely Japanese, depending on their profession or trade.

No Bidân will acknowledge an ability to speak an Afro-Mauritanian language, because they are widely considered by the Bidân as inferior languages. This is the case, even if the Bidân grew up alongside Peulh, Soninké, and Wolof or Bambara children and learnt their language as a child. The vast majority of educated and uneducated Afro-Mauritanians speak several Afro-Mauritanian languages. They all converse openly and frequently in French and occasionally in quite good English or Arabic. Haratin, because of their traditionally suppressed level of education, generally only speak Hassaniya and only some are able to converse in very poor French. The younger Haratin generation, however, are often far more educated than previous generations. This is especially true if affiliated to a wealthy Bidân. These Haratin are able to hold basic conversations in French.

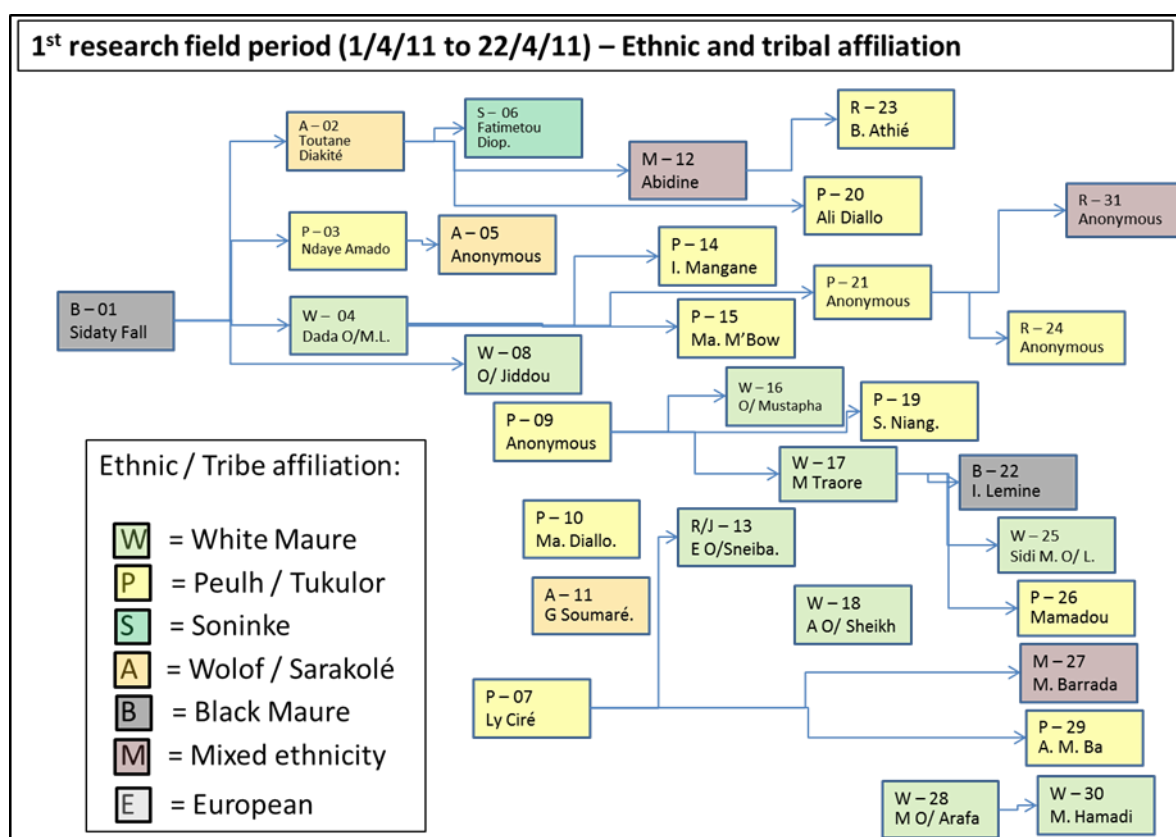


Figure 2-2 Ethnic and tribal affiliation of participants in first Mauritanian field period, 1-22 April 2011

Nevertheless, two participants, in particular, exemplify the social and linguistic complexity of Mauritanian society. They are the multi-lingual Professor Zacharia Ould Ahmed Salem and ex-Ambassador Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody, both of whom, despite being Hartani, are highly educated and respected members of Nouakchott's social milieu. The night-watchman Abdou Salam (Ould) Tabane was a curious anomaly, as apparently an uneducated casual worker; he was not only fluent in French, Peulh and Arabic, but also spoke at length in an extremely eloquent manner on the complex social problem of ethnicity in Mauritania³².

³² Interview 44A, 24 December 2011

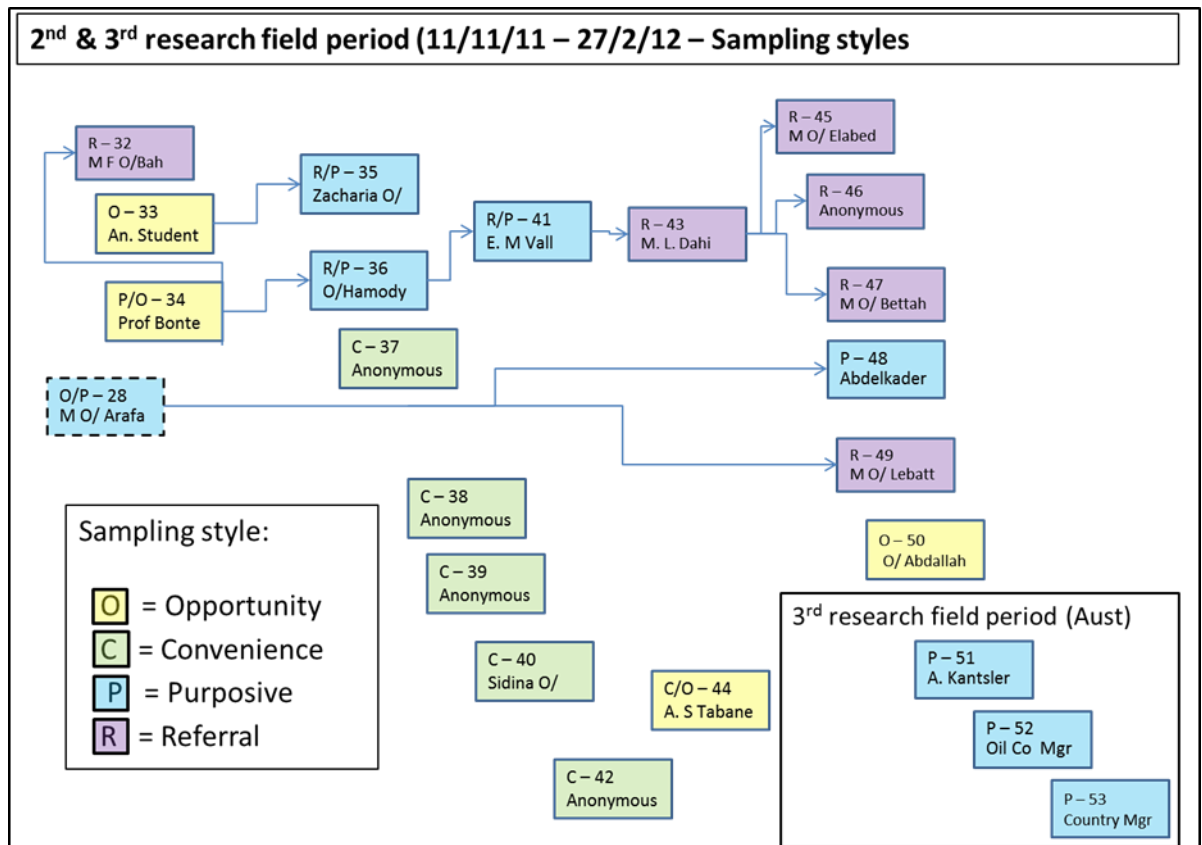


Figure 2-3 Sampling style adopted in the course of the second and third field sampling periods, 11 November 2011 to 27 January 2012

The researcher is bi-lingual and able to speak and read fluently in French. For the purpose of the research, therefore, all interviews were in French and all audio files of these interviews were transcribed in French, with only a few translated into English. All Mauritians are able to speak at least rudimentary French, and no potential participant was rejected because they could not speak either French or English.

Questionnaire for in-depth interviews

The original structured questionnaire designed prior to the pilot survey in Mali, was based on the principle of eliciting information about certain events, situations, individuals and groups of individuals, as perceived and interpreted by the participants. Structured, simple and open questions were formulated and designed to be asked in a fixed order, interspaced with specific repeated

questions used to verify participant credibility. The questions were designed to elicit the personal experience and history of participants. These “stories” were then coded into several node themes, or “nodes”, that built up to form the core of the data used for the present interpretation.

The formal questionnaire began in Section 1, with some general questions. These dealt with the participant’s family and their general perception of the future for their country. The purpose of this section was to put the participant at ease and be open to further questions, some of which related to sensitive personal and socio-political issues. It then moved onto questions about socio-political developments in Mauritania, coups and palace revolts and their relationship to the Maure tribes and Afro-Mauritanian ethnic groups.

Section 2 consisted of a short series of questions on the country’s natural resource wealth and the ability of the government to manage its revenues, now and in the future, with the potential growth of further mineral resource wealth. The question of the “resource curse” or “oil curse” and its effects was introduced at this stage and discussed. The researcher was conscious of the risk of influencing subsequent responses to questions related to this topic.

The next section on the country’s formal and informal institutions proved the most interesting in terms of the participants’ responses. In this section, questions and comments needed to be handled carefully, taking into account participants’ ethnic backgrounds, social positions and personal characteristics. Some participants were quite ill at ease discussing particular historical events. For example, some Peulh interviewees had difficulties discussing the events of 1989-91, and others were sometimes hesitant, guarded and tight-lipped when asked to evaluate the government’s “present” performance.

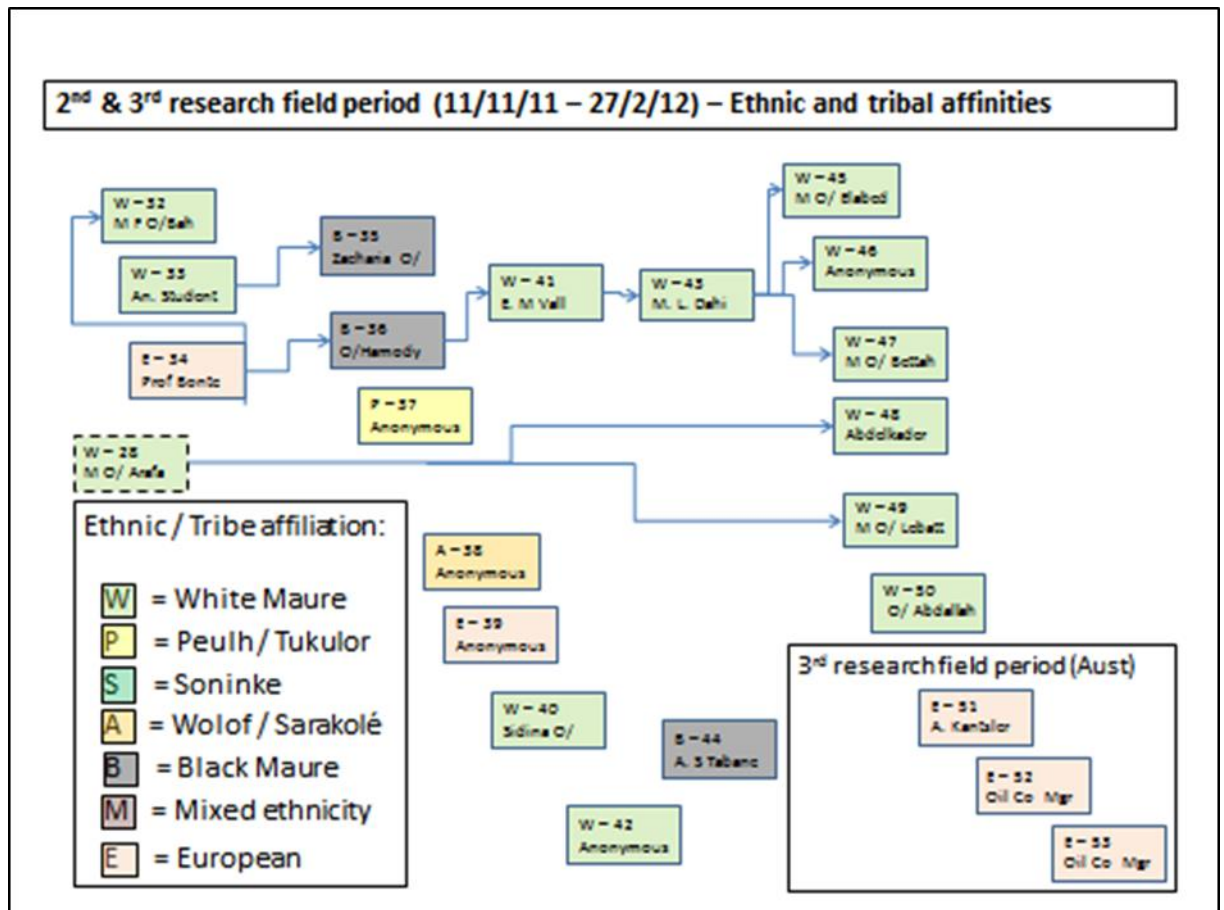


Figure 2-4 Ethnic and tribal affiliation of participants in 2nd and 3rd field periods, 11 November 2011 to 27 January 2012

In Mali during the pilot study, some participants spoke emotionally and extensively on similar sensitive questions. For example, participants revealed that the north-south social “fault-line” between Tuaregs and Negro-Africans in Mali was a zone of extreme fragility³³. This Malian fault-line or unstable situation is, in some ways, replicated in Mauritania with the divide between Bidân and Haratin on the one hand, and Afro-Mauritanians on the other. Although leading questions were avoided, the researcher was aware of this social divide prior to the field survey. The next set of questions allowed participants willing to develop this theme to offer their views in more detail.

³³ Compare this to the call for Azawad autonomy which first flared up in 1957, again 1963 shortly after independence and continues to today.

In section 4, there were opportunities for participants to discuss further their views on the possible links between the sudden influx of resource revenues for a government and the phenomenon of coup d'états. Almost all questions, including sensitive questions regarding the 1989 events in Mauritania, were framed within the realm of a participant's personal experience within that set of circumstances or that event and as it imparted directly on the participant. Broader, more abstract questions were avoided with less educated and lower-income class participants, although some surprises were encountered such as the eloquent and informative young Haratin night watchman, Abdou Salam Tabane³⁴ referred to earlier.

In addition to these questions, the consistency of participants' answers was evaluated by the inclusion of certain key questions concerning ethnicity, the government and certain particular historical events. These were repeated a number of times and in different ways throughout the interview. This technique gave a basis for identifying the trustworthiness of participants and several participants were identified as inconsistent in their views. The information gathered from these particular interviews therefore was either discarded or used with suitable caution.

While it was envisaged that some 30 individuals of various ethnic and social backgrounds would be identified and invited to participate, in the final count there were 60 willing participants (53 formally and 7 informally). The reluctance of the Mauritians to discuss certain topics with a non-Mauritanian was evident, most especially the racialised conflict of 1989-1991. This reluctance was overcome in most instances by showing patience and empathy towards the particular participants and an understanding of their worldviews.

The survey instrument thus evolved over the weeks of interviews from a set of relatively straightforward questions to a more complex interviewing

³⁴ Interview 44A, conducted 11:30 pm 24 December 2011

process that sought to build up a picture of participants' views, prejudices and overall worldviews. Although the questionnaire formed the base point of all interviews and was useful in laying the ground rules for engagement with the participants, in the course of the extended one-on-one meetings, an atmosphere of trust and flexibility led several participants to return repeatedly for recorded conversations on particular subjects. These in-depth interviews allowed the documentation of valuable information for evaluation and analysis. Not all material is used in this thesis, as it covers a wide range of topics, relevant to a much wider appreciation of the country and its people.

The meetings sometimes began as general conversations and evolved into deep discussions of interest, but this approach was not so effective in dealing with specific targeted topics. More useful in gathering specifically targeted information, were sessions of in-depth interviews with purposefully targeted and pre-stated aspects of a question requiring interpretation and evaluation. The in-depth interview technique was especially suited for meeting with politicians and other key high-profile stakeholders with extensive knowledge and expertise, and who had more experience and confidence in talking publicly. These influential individuals were approached usually through referral.

Online Documentation

Between 2009 and 2012, a regular, and at times daily, watch was kept on certain Mauritanian and international information websites. Background and current news information, relevant to the subjects discussed in this study, was gathered from these websites and used with discretion in the analysis of the socio-political events of the period examined.

In addition, several interviews and commentaries were recorded and transcribed that dealt with the Arab Spring and international socio-political events and were broadcast by RFI (Radio France International; www.rfi.fr/) during the period 2010 and 2012. These assisted the research to understand Mauritania's international relations and the efforts of its incumbent

government to modernise Mauritania. The information gleaned from these sources also helped inform many of the socially and politically oriented questions in the interviews conducted between April and June 2011, and November 2011 to January 2012.

First interview period: Nouakchott - 1 to 22 April 2011

The “convenient” selection of participants began at Hotel Marhaba. Mr Sidaty Fall, a Hartani and the hotel manager known by the researcher for some ten years, agreed to participate in the research and be the first Mauritanian to be formally interviewed on 4 April 2011³⁵. Several more in-depth discussions with Mr Fall followed, focussing on specific topics of interest brought up in the course of the first congenial meeting.

Following this first interview, through opportunity and referral sampling, 22 other hotel employees were interviewed between 4 April and 21 April 2011. They came from several ethnic and social groups of Mauritanian society (see Figures 2-1 and 2-2). Among the many participants was the visiting African director of the hotel chain, Souleymane Niang³⁶, a self-exiled Afro-Mauritanian Peulh and ex-university history lecturer. Mr Niang proved to be the most valuable, if at times biased, source of historical and sociological information about Mauritania. In total 23 participants were “conveniently” sourced from this hotel.

The sample of 23 participants from the hotel for this first field exercise, were all fully employed. The social and cultural setting of Mauritania made it difficult to interview the unemployed or those surviving on casual day-to-day terms in the capital. Nine out of twenty-three (39% of these sampled at the hotel) were Peulh, compared to a national average believed to be closer to

³⁵ Interview 01A, during the course of which we discussed, slavery, the FLAM, the 1989-1991 ethnic problems of Mauritania, Senegal-Mauritania relations and any other aspects of the Haratin’s survival and future in Mauritania as well as their relationships with both Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians

³⁶ Interviews 19A and 19B, conducted over several sessions over a number of days beginning 14 April 2011 and consisting of an aggregate of some 4 ½ hours

8%³⁷. Only two, or 8%, of those sampled in the course of this first field period were Bidân who make up close to 30% of the national population. The balance of those interviewed was made up of Haratin or Black Maures (26%), other Afro-Mauritanians (21%), and two participants (7%) from other African countries.

Efforts were made to encourage more Bidân hotel employees to participate in the survey. Five, from various Bidân tribes, eventually took part. Three participants showed strong feelings of unease during the interview and provided unclear answers to several key questions³⁸. The last Bidân hotel employee to be interviewed was Mr Sidi Mohamed Ould Mohamed Lemine³⁹, the hotel's chief accountant. Sidi was an old friend of M'Boye Ould Arafa's deceased father, and his direct and intelligent approach to questions was refreshing.

During the first field period of interviewing, only three out of a further eight participants sourced from outside the hotel, were Bidân or white Maures. The first was Ely Ould Sneiba⁴⁰, a political activist willing to speak openly and strongly against the present political regime as well as traditional tribalism. The second was an old friend, Mr M'Boye Ould Arafa⁴¹, who, while at first reluctant became a wealth of information and advice through his formal first interview and the many subsequent discussions centred on specific topics. The third and last white Maure participant was a very knowledgeable language professor, Mr Hamadi Ould Mohamed Hamadi⁴². He was the second person in Mauritania, after Ely Ould Sneiba, to refuse to give his ethnic grouping. He

³⁷ This willingness by Peulh employees is because of Mr Niang's participation, himself being Peulh

³⁸ Interview 04A, 08A, and 16A

³⁹ Interview 21A, 15 April 2011

⁴⁰ Interview 13A, 10 April 2011

⁴¹ Interviews 28A to 28I, conducted between 20 April and 16 November 2011. Mr M'Boye Ould Arafa, a Bidân of the Idawali tribe from Tidjikja by migration, originally from the Torkoz tribe of central-northern Mauritania. Arafa provided almost four hours of information-packed interview time, and at times delved into the peculiarities of the Maure society

⁴² Interview 30A, 20 April 2011

said simply that he was of “Mauritanian” nationality, wilfully hiding the Bidân tribe to which he belonged.

From 20 April, the date of a rewarding interview with Ould Mohamed Hamadi, to 24 May 2011, when the researcher left the field, it proved very difficult to convince Bidân to participate in the research. The researcher surmised that this reticence was perhaps due to Bidân satisfaction with the status quo, in contrast with the more complex feelings of Afro-Mauritanian or Haratin citizens. During this time, a further eight participants from outside the hotel were interviewed, totalling 31 for the first field trip.

On 24 May, the researcher returned to Perth on the advice of several Mauritanian friends, because of unusually larger street protests and some minor social disruptions on the streets of Nouakchott.

Second interview period: Nouakchott - 11 November 2011 to 4 January 2012

The second and last field trip to Nouakchott between 11 November 2011 and 4 January 2012, evolved differently. The researcher spent the first three weeks, between 11 November and 4 December 2011, unable to solicit any further participants, especially among the targeted Bidân ethnicity.

The “drought” of interviews ended on 4 December 2011, when contact was made with a highly respected accountant and part-time academic, Mohamed Fall Ould Bah. Like the researcher, he was a “very mature student” who at the age of 58 had just finished his doctorate on Islamic financial institutions in Africa. Mohamed Fall Ould Bah was successfully interviewed⁴³ and provided referrals to several other individuals. These referred participants were high-ranking political and business elites and their wish to participate anonymously is respected⁴⁴.

⁴³ Interview 32A, 13 December 2011

⁴⁴ Interviews 38A and 42A, conducted 20 and 24 December 2011 respectively

In addition, Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte of the Paris-based and academically renowned ‘Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques’ (CNRS/CERI), agreed to be interviewed. This was fortuitous because he is a world-famous social anthropologist and author of many books and articles on Mauritania and West Africa.⁴⁵ He informally as well as formally discussed Mauritania on several occasions during his visit to Nouakchott in December 2011. His referrals to several of his Mauritanian colleagues were also of great value and his referral to ex-Ambassador Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody⁴⁶ was most rewarding. Mr Ould Hamody⁴⁷, a very learned Maure (reputed of Hartani origin) was Mauritania’s American ambassador for many years. This is in spite of humble beginnings, as revealed in his birthdate record of 1 January. This date means that he was born in a tent on an unspecified day, most likely the son of ex-slave members of the nomadic Smacide tribe that roamed the region of Atar in northern Mauritania. The referral to Mr Ould Hamody led subsequently to a referral to ex-President, Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall⁴⁸, the Junta leader co-responsible, with his cousin, the present President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, for the 2005 fall of President Maaouya (Ould) Sid’Ahmed Ould Taya.

An especially valued participant was Mr Mohamed Lamine Dahi⁴⁹, whom Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall called during the first meeting on 23 December 2011. Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall instructed Mohamed Lamine Dahi, as his chief of Cabinet, to give assistance to this research, and most especially on the question of the Woodside payment of US\$ 100 million to the government and popular claims regarding its misappropriation. Through Mr Ould Hamody and the participation of Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall on 23 December 2011, further meetings were fixed with influential Bidân who had served in the 2005-2007 military government. Mr Dahi, at the ex-President’s request,

⁴⁵ interview 34A, 5 December 2011

⁴⁶ Interviews 36A, 36B and 36C, conducted 13 to 23 December 2011

⁴⁷ Photo gallery: Photo 11

⁴⁸ Interview 41A and 41B, 23 December 2011 and Photo gallery: Photo 15

⁴⁹ Interview 43A, 43B and 43C, conducted 24 to 31 December 2011 and Photo gallery: Photo 16

referred me to Mr Mohamed Ould Elabed⁵⁰, who had been Minister of Economic Affairs in 2005, and Mr Mahfoud Ould Bettah⁵¹, Director General of the Ministry of Justice in 2005, and present President of the Bar. Both men had participated to a significant degree in the pursuit of Woodside regarding the question of the illegality of the 2004 contractual amendments, and attempts to make the company legally accountable.

Through an opportune meeting in the street and subsequent interview with a young Bidân student⁵² and his referral to his lecturer, the researcher was also able to meet and interview the influential Hartani Mauritanian writer and lecturer in political science, Dr Zacharia Ould Ahmed Salem⁵³. This led by “snowball referral”, to a cascade of meetings with the targeted ethnic group, the Bidân.

A further opportunity was created when a well-known Peulh academic in Nouakchott agreed to be interviewed.⁵⁴ This participant recounted the 1989 events in a moderate and logical manner. However, his deep involvement, as a Peulh, in these events showed through in his engaging description of the institutionalised racism that exists in Mauritania against the Peulh.

A referral by M’Boye Ould Arafa enabled an interview with his friend, the famous historian, academic and socio-political commentator, Isselmou Ould Abdelkader,⁵⁵ a Bidân, ex-minister in President Taya’s government, researcher and author of the politically controversial, “Ou va la Mauritanie?” (2008). The interview with Isselmou Ould Abdelkader was most relevant and significant in shedding light on an important facet of the evolution of the petroleum industry in the period examined, as well as on the Woodside contractual amendments of 2004.

⁵⁰ Interview 45A, 26 December 2011

⁵¹ Interview 47A, 29 December 2011

⁵² Interview 33A, 4 December 2011 (anonymous)

⁵³ Interview 35A, 11 December 2011

⁵⁴ Interview 37A, 14 December 2011 (anonymous)

⁵⁵ Interview 48A, 1 January 2012

Several other individuals from varying socio-economic, Afro-Mauritanian and Bidân backgrounds were selectively interviewed in order to complete the sample population to saturation.

Third interview period: Perth - 4 January to 27 February 2012

To complete the sample of people involved with the nascent petroleum industry in Mauritania, participants sourced from the petroleum industry were interviewed. Key Woodside Petroleum personnel were purposively approached and asked if they would agree to an interview.

Although at first Woodside personnel formally involved with Mauritania appeared in casual conversation to be keen to assist in the research, an official company stance was very quickly taken once the researcher began to make definite arrangements for interviews with executives. The reason given for the inability of personnel to take part in interviews was that Woodside personnel were “strained” from the two years spent explaining themselves following Senator Milne’s accusations to the Australian Federal Police of corrupt dealings by Woodside in Mauritania.

In addition, no current or past Woodside lawyers who were employed during the period being examined were willing to participate in the research, and Woodside gave no guidance as to how to contact ex-Woodside lawyers from this period. A Herbert Smith lawyer influential in the negotiations suggested he could help, but declined to do so, on the grounds of confidentiality when requested. All other Woodside personnel declined to be interviewed.

The researcher was eventually referred to a Woodside lawyer, and in lieu of face-to-face interviews, a short number of uninformative written answers were offered in response to the researcher’s questions.

Three key ex-employees of Woodside did agree, however, to be interviewed. They were Agu Kantsler⁵⁶, former Executive Vice President – Exploration at Woodside during the period being researched; Peter Grant, the then-Manager in charge of Woodside operations in Mauritania⁵⁷ between 1998 and 2004; and an ex-senior manager⁵⁸ who preferred to remain anonymous. Their combined analysis of the interaction between Woodside and the Mauritians between 1998 and 2008 forms an important and integral part of the interview data.

Data Collection

In total, 53 participants were formally interviewed in Mauritania and Australia, and a further seven participated on a voluntary but informal basis, not willing to complete any forms or give any personal details.

The sampling programme and progress is diagrammatically represented in Figure 2-1 and Figure 2-3, and each diagram includes the name (where appropriate) and ethnic group of the participants that took part in the data collection for this research. Table 2-1 gives some basic details relevant to the research study of each formal participant.

All participants whose name appears in this research agreed to their names and their comments being used. This includes ex-President Ely Mohamed Vall who requested to review any quotations attributed to him before inclusion. Those participants, who after a thorough explanation of the purpose of the research, decided to have their names suppressed, were few. They are referred to as “anonymous” in the body of the thesis. Their details are kept in locked archive files by ethical agreement until 2019, together with the primary and secondary data used in this research. They are until that time, accessible only to the researcher and supervisors, and individuals who obtain express permission from the researcher.

⁵⁶ Interview 51A, 30 January 2012

⁵⁷ Interview 52A, 3 February 2012

⁵⁸ Interview 53A, 27 February 2012 (anonymous)

Of the 53 participants who agreed to be officially interviewed, only five (5) were females and all of these were Afro-Mauritanians, reflecting the cultural reluctance of Muslim women, especially Bidân women, to be seen in public with a stranger and most certainly to speak privately with a male foreigner. It has to be said, though, that this situation for Muslim women in Mauritania is changing.

The demographic make-up of the sample roughly reflects the make-up of the male Mauritanian population, with 32, or 60%, of participants being between 29 and 49 years old and therefore born after independence in 1960. Most participants were quite willing to have their names quoted and be identifiable in the final thesis, with only a few reluctant to give details and requesting to remain anonymous.

Number of participants	Ethnicity
22	Bidân
16	Peulh
5	Mixed
5	Haratin
5	Westerners
Total 53	

Table 2-1 Formal interview participants

Over the combined field periods, 22 Bidân from varying tribes were interviewed. They range in social background from low-ranked public servants (for example, an anonymous Bidân⁵⁹) to the leader of the military Junta between 2005 and 2007.⁶⁰ In addition, there were five Haratin, a lesser number than desired, as this social/ethnic group is estimated to make up some

⁵⁹ Interview 38A, 20 December 2011 (anonymous)

⁶⁰ Interview 41A, 23 December 2011

40% of the Mauritanian population. This unrepresentative sample of Haratin participants is due to the linguistic and social difficulties associated with meeting and interviewing Haratin. Haratin are Hassaniya-speakers with, in the vast majority, little knowledge of French. They are generally uneducated (with notable exceptions) and were extremely suspicious and reluctant to participate in the present research. Many of the Haratin in the lowest economic standing of daily hired hand would not be interviewed fearing the wrath of the Bidân “masters”⁶¹.

While the under-representation of the Haratin in the sample was not ideal, they were not the focus of interest in the study in themselves, as they did not have the same access to high-level dealings in the petroleum industry as the Bidân and to a less extent, the Peulh.

Sixteen Peulh were interviewed and only one other Negro-African. In all, five participants were of mixed ethnicity, Maure and Afro-Mauritanian or mixed Afro-Mauritanian, reflecting intermarriage across ethnic groups. Five Caucasians were purposely selected for their potential contribution to the database.

Transcription and translation

All interviews in Mauritania were conducted in French and, along with several recordings of panel discussions and commentaries from the Abidjan-based French international radio station, RFI, were sent digitally to over a dozen selected French transcribers throughout Australia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, over a period of twelve months from August 2011 to July 2012. The transcripts were sent electronically and finally collated as word-files able to be entered into NVivo 9.1, a software programme designed for qualitative analysis. Each word-file transcription received via email was immediately checked against the audio recording for accuracy by the researcher.

⁶¹ Bidân elite, pers. comm

All quotations in the study were translated into English by the researcher, unless otherwise specified, as in the case of six interviews dealing with the question of Woodside's \$ 100 million payment to the government of Mauritania. In the case of these interviews, it was considered appropriate that an official English translation be used and so the selected transcribed interviews were translated by an accredited French-to-English translator. These formal translations were also checked by the researcher. All formal translations were considered adequate for inclusion as received.

In total, 144 transcriptions were completed, including 112 interviews. This represented a total interviewing time of 135.5 hours, with some interviews taking a few minutes and others longer up to a maximum of three and a half hours⁶². Each one hour of interview recording necessitated an average of five hours of transcribing, and thus transcribing hours totalled some 677 hours. The transcribing and official translation necessary for the research task took over twelve months to complete. Official translations are not included in the table below.

Task	Hours (~)	Result
Interviews	135.5	Audio-files
Transcription	677	Raw Word-files
Review	812	Final Word-files
NVivo 9.1	1,194	Coded Nodes

Table 2-2. Time spent on evaluation of participants' interviews

CAQDAS Software

In order to be able to handle the large database generated by the interview data, as well as the online documentation gathered electronically, all word-file transcribed interviews, radio recordings and online documentation were imported into the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 9.1 (CAQDAS).

⁶² Appendix 5

It was necessary to select and file selected sections of the interviews into themes using this software in order to facilitate review and selection of pertinent data. This process took 1,194 hours of selection or “coding” in themes to “nodes”.

Data storage, ethical considerations and retrieval

Audio files, transcripts, word-files and translations of the interviews form the bulk of the data collected. Printed and digital files of documents, online news items, compilations from reference books and copies of selected government documents form a portion of the physical material stored on the Curtin University campus. The data is collated, documented and catalogued for ease of access in a cover report that lists all material and information archived in order to facilitate eventual retrieval through a clear working system.

Approval from Curtin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) was received and, prior to any in-country activity, written approval was received from both the Malian and Mauritanian governments⁶³. In addition, as the research involved recording personal information, Ethical Approval of Research Involving Humans (Form A) HR 132/2010 was obtained. Permission was sought from official channels for accessing government files, policy documents and regulations, but limited material was collected from government libraries or archives. The principal government document acquired for the research, was a document, dated 29 March 2007 and entitled “Bilan de la Transition – Rapport sur l’activité de Gouvernement de Transition (3 août 2005 – 5 mars 2007)”⁶⁴. The hardcopy document was given to me by the Junta leader, Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, during his interview and while discussing the national budget requirements over the period with which the report deals and the question of the use of Woodside’s

⁶³ Appendix 3

⁶⁴ “Prime Ministerial Office – Report on the Activities of the Transitional government between 3 August 2005 and 5 March 2007”, March 2007

payment of US\$ 100 million. The pages relevant to the present research are appended.⁶⁵

The written consent of each fully informed and willing participant was obtained and it was made clear that participation was voluntary and that it was possible to withdraw from the research project at any time. They were informed that any information collected would also be erased from the research data if their permission to use it for research was withdrawn prior to 31 March 2013.

Some of the data collected for this study are sensitive so fully restricted archival access is requested for a minimum of five years from the official due date of completion of the research period, officially 12 May 2014. This gives open access only after the possible second and last presidential mandate of Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz, which will end November 2018. The reason for this is that some of the information given by several of the participants deals negatively with the incumbent president, his family, his tribe and his political entourage. All care was taken in retaining anonymity for the participants who requested it. However, if any compromising information was revealed to ill-intentioned third parties and traced back to the participant while President Abdel Aziz remains in office, it could compromise the safety of several of the more openly critical participants. Documents that identify anonymous participants, such as names or domicile, employment or profession were removed from the data files but kept external to the university in a locked file by the researcher. Many participants, nevertheless, agreed in writing to allow their name to be included in the research material and to be quoted in the final research thesis, including some participants who voiced strong disapproval of the President.

The request of the incumbent President's cousin, ex-President Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, to send any direct quotations to him, or his colleague Mr

⁶⁵ Appendix 6

Mohamed Ould Dahi, for verification and approval was fulfilled, but no answer had been received at time of writing.

All information is accessible only with the researcher's approval, and after five years any archived data at Curtin will be disposed of or returned to the researcher as deemed appropriate in consultation between the researcher and the appropriate university authorities.

Chapter 3 – Historical roots of contemporary socio-political divisions

The role of the petroleum industry in the political development of Mauritania from 2001 to 2011 cannot be understood without knowledge of the historical and socio-political context of Mauritanian society and a recognition that political instability is not a new phenomenon that begun with the discovery of oil in Mauritania.

This chapter and the next thus examine the historical and socio-political context within which the petroleum industry developed. In particular, these chapters discuss the existence in Mauritania of deep divisions or fault-lines between communities based on long-standing racial, linguistic and cultural differences (Herbst, McNamee and Mills, 2012). French colonial rule sought to impose on these differences modernist notions of state sovereignty, fixed borders, and an administrative, judicial and military system in order to facilitate colonial domination and carry out French notions of the ‘mission civilisatrice’, a French doctrine aimed at the assimilation of colonial territories into French society. In examining the historical development of Mauritania, the chapter shows that the country’s present-day political instability is an outcome of the interplay between changing traditional indigenous social structures, foreign imposed institutions and the actions of individuals and communities differentially located within the country’s political-economic structure.

It is argued that when Mauritania gained independence from France in 1960, it consisted of diverse ethnic communities in which sub-national loyalties were stronger than any sense of national identity. Much of Mauritania’s post-independence politics has consisted of attempts to manage relations between different ethnic groups, with the Bidân or white Maure occupying the privileged position as the dominant group.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the formative prehistoric period of Mauritania followed by a description of the major ethnic communities that

have developed over the centuries and today make up the bulk of the population. In addition to the Mauritanian writers mentioned above, Raph A. Austen's "Trans-Sahara Africa in world history" (2010) and James L. Newman's "The peopling of Africa: A geographic interpretation" (1995) form an integral part of the background literature for the first section of the chapter.

The chapter then provides an historical narrative from the latter part of the colonial period to state independence and the changes that occurred in Mauritania's socio-political landscape up to the pre-oil period of the mid-1990s during the rule of President Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of some of the socio-political processes that have played a major role in the country's development. These include patrimonial governance, corruption, tribalism, economic-cum-ethnic divisions, poverty and slavery.

Prehistoric multiethnic society

A little-known Black African people inhabited the inland reaches of northwest Africa at the end of the Late Stone Age, prior to the period of desertification beginning some 10,000 years ago (Newman 1995, 31). Throughout Mauritania, southern Morocco and Western Sahara, once a fertile region, traces have been found of fishing and hunter-gatherer communities, as well as later copper extracting, communities dating back 7,000 years⁶⁶. However, as the world's climate gradually became drier over the next few thousand years, this population retreated, evidently towards the more fertile south and north, leaving behind dispersed remnant individual groups landlocked within limited watered regions and oases throughout the encroaching desert. As groups retreated north, they were probably subjugated to and absorbed by Berbers as no apparent traces of them remain. Those that travelled south mixed with ethnic groups arriving from the east to form separate ethnic sedentary communities. The main communities were the Wolof on the western seaboard, Soninké further inland and along the fertile valley of the Senegal River, and

⁶⁶ Interview 34A with Professor Pierre Bonte, 5 December 2012

the related ethnic groups of Sarakolé, Seré, Toucouleur and Songhai tribes further to the east and south.

Oasis-dwelling groups left behind in the drying Sahara were subjugated, enslaved and absorbed when waves of migration into this region brought new settlers. The first known migrants to settle in significant numbers in the drying Sahara region were the Berber (Rogerson 1998). These nomadic pastoralists were referred to as “Maures” by the Romans who occupied the region in the earliest period of the first millennium A.D., a region that would later become Morocco. The Romans regarded them as “brigands” that organised guerrilla raids on the occupied lands and thus sought to force these troublesome nomads south as increasingly larger tracts of land were developed (Sigman 1976). Later, in the 7th century, Arab tribes began to arrive, and this continued until the 17th century. Thus, major socio-cultural upheavals began some 5,500 years ago, not only in contemporary Mauritania, but also in northern Africa and other parts of West Africa.

The Black African people who moved south settled as sedentary fishermen and agriculturalists along the strip of the Senegal River flood plain. This resettlement occurred from the mouth of the river delta on the Atlantic to the western hinterland on the Mali border in the southeastern region of present day Mauritania. In the desert regions to the north of the Senegal valley, intermixing took place between the pale-skinned Berbers, and their Black African vassals and neighbours. Such intermixing was already widespread prior to the arrival of the various Arab tribes.

As Berber and then Arab tribes traded, fought each other and later intermixed in these desertified zones, the settled black ethnicities to the south were periodically displaced and pillaged for slaves and supplies by the encroaching northern nomadic tribesmen (Poulet 1904, 3). These regional movements towards the south later came to be associated with Muslim conquests and the spread of Islam. Because of these population movements, interactions and conquests, Arab culture and language became dominant in this area of

northwest Africa. Islam provided a unifying force in the region, not yet defined in terms of sovereign states by the European conquest.

Modern Maure society that emerged from these historical changes retained pronounced social divisions between the Beni Hassan Maures of Arab origin who occupy the highest social order, the holy men, Marabouts or Zawiya (Arab-Berber) slightly below them and the Znaga or Senaga (Arab-Berber-Black) who occupy the next-to lowest position in the hierarchy of the Hassaniya-speaking white Maures⁶⁷. The lowest rung in the Maure hierarchy is that of the Haratin (singular; Hartani) who are the freed African slaves and descendants of these freed slaves. In present day Mauritania, the Haratin occupy low status jobs and fill the lowest rung of society, with certain notable exceptions. As the Mauritanian historian, politician and author Isselmou Abdelkader points out, an observer might be surprised by the complex socio-politics of the society:

In which people of apparent Arab origin display cultural practices similar to those of ethnically and racially defined Black Africans, while equally surprising, the observer might be confronted by individuals of apparent Black African origin expressing strongly pro-Arab and nationalist leanings. These attitudes can only be understood once one recognises that in Mauritanian society...each has become the other, forgetting, ignoring or even fighting against what he was ⁶⁸

Junta leader between 2005 and 2007, Colonel Ely (Ould)⁶⁹ Mohamed Vall gives a Bidân's perspective on the historical evolution of this region. He states that the Western view of the region "before the Europeans' arrival" was that it consisted of anarchic, marauding and unorganised pillaging tribes hell-bent

⁶⁷ Photo gallery: Photos 11, 12, 13 and 14

⁶⁸ Abdelkader 2008, page 11 (Passage translated by the researcher). Isselmou Abdelkader, now retired, is a member of the Idawali tribe, a noted public servant, ex-governor of Zouérat and minister in the latter years of President Taya's regime and a prolific political writer

⁶⁹ 'Ould' means 'son of' and is traditionally used by all Maures in their surnames. Occasionally, some elites drop the 'Ould' from their name, as with General Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall and his cousin, the ex- General, President Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz

on terrorising and enslaving the black sedentary settlers of the region. He went on:

I will give you my point-of-view...Why do people feel that before colonisation, there has never been a state in Mauritania. Therefore, that this area of desert that now includes the borders of Mauritania was an “uninhabited” space, an “open” “unlimited” space “without borders”. That it was an “ownerless space”? I say, and I stress, the words “*ownerless...without a master*”! A place where no sovereignty was exercised in one way or another...No authority existed, and that the authority of a particular tribe was determined on the basis of its strength, depending on its ability to dominate the individual... This was a place, where the “law of the jungle” was played out openly.

I feel that this way of seeing the situation in this region in these times, is quite incorrect.

In the first instance, this space that is now Mauritania, the space in its totality, including the Arabs, the Arab tribes, as well as the Black African space....I tell you that this space has always existed as a “virtual” state.

This was not a state, evident as a single politico-administrative structure in the tradition of western states, with its official centralised structure and an established hierarchy. However, it was a state that was present as a “virtual” state... it worked perfectly...without a centralised structure, without western-style state structures. Moreover, how did it work?

In the first instance...in this region, where no central government existed, there was the common use of a primitive currency, which was at that time already called “Ouguiya”. Within this region, Mauritians have always counted in Ouguiya, and it was therefore natural for Moktar Ould Daddah, the first president of Mauritania, simply to give the name “Ouguiya” to the national currency that he created after independence. He simply decimalised the traditional currency and named it after the virtual currency traditionally used in this region. The “Ouguiya” was an old measure of gold used in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. Its use was so entrenched that when the French colonist arrived and we began using the French Franc or any other currency, we

continued to count in Ouguiya. It must therefore be recognised that there was indeed a “national” currency in existence within this region...

In addition, within this virtual state there was a specific language spoken. Hassaniya was the common language, uniting all the tribes and all the peoples within that space...

In the third instance, there was religion, Islam that united all within this region. There was a language and there was a currency.⁷⁰

The general emphasises that a state-like system existed prior to French rule. It was not organised around a centralised government and bureaucratic institutions with a monopoly of the use of physical force, as in the western sense of the word. Rather, he argues that the Muslim Bidân established a form of socio-political control over other groups present in the region (Copans, 1974). This control was based on the building – through a combination of force, tribute, bribery and reciprocal promises of security and support – of an enduring system of inter-locking political alliances and allegiance. Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall’s argument seeks to counter colonial notions that ‘civilisation’ was a creation of the West, by pointing to the integrating role of Islam and regional and inter-continental trade linking the region to Europe and the Middle East (Mahir 2006, 4). In doing so, he gives greater prominence to his own people in the ‘civilising’ of the region and plays down the historical role of the Black African population in the economic and political development of the region.

It is, however, also because of the colonial period and the self-serving political importance given to the Maures by the French that little has remained of the Black Africans’ historical presence in Mauritania or of the early interactions between Maures and Africans. Mohamed Vall’s insistence on the importance of the “white” Maures’ hegemonic presence, as well as his lack of acknowledgement of the significant presence of Black Africans, reflects the

⁷⁰ Interview 41A with ex-junta leader General Ely Mohamed Vall, 23 November 2012

general tendency of the Maures to foster their own civilising role in the emergence of contemporary Mauritanian society.

A rare and brief historical contribution for Mauritania, in the online daily magazine, *Le Quotidien*, lends credence to the important presence of sedentary Black Africans in the southern portion of Mauritania, as well as to their interaction and integration with the Arab-Berber tribes that were increasingly encroaching on their traditional territory from the north (Oïga Abdoulaye, 2012). Reviewing literature dealing with the immediate pre-independence era of Mauritania, it appears little has been written of the role of black Africans. Living as sedentary village-dwelling family groups within the Senegal River valley, and especially the delta region where the French established their first trading post at Saint Louis in 1659, they had encountered and interacted with the French much earlier than the nomadic Maures from the desert regions to the north. Sedentary black Africans, in contrast to the nomadic Maures, were readily recruited into working for the French administrators and later the French military⁷¹.

At independence, many Africans worked closely with the Maure elites to establish the state of Mauritania, despite having taken a lesser role in the leadership prior to independence. One such individual, who was a participant in the present research, was the late Gaye Silly Soumaré, a Haïre Sarakolé (or Soninké) from the southern province of Guidimakla. He actively assisted Moktar Ould Daddah gain independence for Mauritania, acting as his Minister for Youth, an important post in the early years of the newly formed country. He later served his country as an ambassador in several European countries and in his later years as a parliamentary Senator.

Colony to independence

With the rise of France's maritime power in the 17th century, French mercantile activity spread down the West African coast and became

⁷¹ As evidenced by the half million black Africans that took up arms and died for France during the two World Wars

established in the southern region of Mauritania in 1659. As commercially based, proto-colonial occupation grew, and with the legitimacy lent to it by the Treaty of Berlin of 1885, France's commercial activities were eventually matched by the establishment of a military presence beginning in 1902. This occurred in what became known as French West Africa (OAF) an area covering today's Mauritania, as well as Mali, Niger, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte, visiting Nouakchott in December 2011, generously participated in the present research and spent many hours in discussions on Mauritania, giving depth to the historical approach to understanding contemporary socio-political instability, developed in the present research:

The Oualad Béiri [an important Zawiya (religious) tribal group of "small nomads"] from the Trarza region of Southwestern Mauritania, moreover, had had long and quite friendly [commercial] contact with the French. Sheikh Sidya Baba was one of those religious chiefs who contributed to the French [military] conquest of the Maures' territory. Sheikh Sidya Baba facilitated the conquest by helping the French bring the Mauritanian Emirates of Trarza and Brakna under colonial rule in the first years of the 20th century... The assistance given to the colonial power by the religious tribes secured French protection from raids and extortion by the northern warrior tribes of Beni Hassan descent. It also gave the maraboutic Oualad Béiri tribes a prominent, coveted but unexpected socio-political position in the colonial and post-colonial state, including and most importantly, the education in France of Moktar Ould Daddah as a lawyer, and his promotion to the position of first president of independent Mauritania in 1961.⁷²

In 1903, the French government passed a decree recognising "The Protectorate of the Country of the Maures of the lower Senegal" in acknowledgement of the military support of the pro-French Maures of the Emirates of Brakna, Trarza and Idouaich. In 1920, a second decree was passed which used the name "Mauritania" for the first time. The Arab-Berber people continued their pastoral, nomadic ways of life, which included trade with each other, but also

⁷² Interview 34A with Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte, 5 December 2011

raids or *razzias*⁷³ on one another as well as on the sedentary Black African communities along the Senegal River. These and other practices had developed through centuries of survival in a hostile environment, and continue to affect the political stability and institutional structure of Mauritania to this day. “Dopage” or the distribution of important government posts to individuals belonging to select Bidân tribes that have ancestral relationship with that of the President⁷⁴, is one commonly quoted example in Afro-Mauritanian circles critical of these practices.

Inter-tribal discontent was generated through the French colonists’ differential treatment of the southern Sahel-dwelling “small nomads” and “big nomads”⁷⁵ of the Sahara Desert. The ‘small nomads’ of the Brakna, Trarza and Idouaich emirates of southern Mauritania accepted, to some extent, the protection of the French, while the ‘big nomads’ of the deep desert to the North, who were largely descended from the Beni Hassan tribes and were resistant to French colonisation, contested the French military occupation until their defeat in 1947.

In addition, the French differed in their treatment of Arab-speaking Maures (Bidân and Haratin) and black Africans. The latter were preferred for their ability in the French language but were considered as inferiors in the eyes of the “white” Maures, the Bidân as well as the French. A Mauritanian well placed to comment on these ethnic relations is the late Gaye Silly Soumaré, a Sarakolé (half Soninké from his mother) originating from the Senegal River valley in the region of Gorgol, who as a young man was a minister in Moktar Ould Daddah’s government and later a Senator and Ambassador for his country. He commented:

⁷³ Pillaging and raiding, termed “*razzias*”, was an integral feature of the Bidân desert existence

⁷⁴ Interview 34A with Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte, 25 January 2009

⁷⁵ These differences were ancient and had been at the core of the thirty-year Char Bouba War (1644-1674) between mainly Arabic Beni Hasan warrior tribes and the Arab-Berber maraboutic tribes of southern Mauritania.

If we consider the relationship between the French and the Maures and the French and the black ethnic groups, the relationship between French and Blacks began long before, because the French were [trading] in Senegal since the 17th century... So little by little, they colonised Senegal. It was their starting base for dealing with other African countries of West Africa, long before their [colonisation] of the Maures' territory... In the first place, it was an inhospitable region, it was the desert and it was much more difficult to penetrate.⁷⁶

The French protected the riverine sedentary and useful “Black” communities against the nomadic Bidân tribes. As the nomadic tribes had no fixed addresses, no fixed land tenure and no definable boundaries in a vast desert land, the French found them difficult to control. In view of their sedentary nature, Black Africans became the preferred bureaucratic aides of the colony, learning French as well as administrative and related skills valued in the administration of the territory.

The establishment of the centralised administrative French system altered important elements of governance within the system of nomadic tribes. However, the system that the French put in place was in turn affected by local socio-political conditions. The French system for dealing directly with the Bidân was to spread its power and authority through the established tribal leadership system. They only dealt, however, with leaders complying with French authorities' demands or those appointed by the French themselves.

World events were however catching up with France's colonial empire, and after two world wars, France would soon lose the visible control it had of its African colonies.

Independence

Political crisis in France heralded the birth of the Fifth Republic in 1958 and of a new constitution that provided for a wider French community whose members would eventually become autonomous republics. However, as

⁷⁶ Interview 11C with the late Gaye Silly Soumaré, 13 April 2011

nationalism swept the African continent in the late 1950s, the Territorial Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, newly proclaimed in October 1958, changed its name to the Constituent Assembly, dropped the French constitution and adopted a national constitution in March 1959, declaring independence on November 28, 1960. This new state was governed by French-imposed institutions, foreign to traditional Bidân culture, including the provision of the constitution itself, elections, political parties and public functions (Villasante-de Beauvais 1998, 133). Nevertheless, with the strong support of the French, Moktar Ould Daddah was selected President in August 1961 by the dominant party in the National Assembly, a Bidân politician and member of a maraboutic “small nomad” tribe from the Trarza region in the Southeastern portion of Mauritania, but a tribe that had consistently assisted the French colonisation efforts⁷⁷.

The support France gave to Moktar Ould Daddah, as well as its involvement in his eventual removal from the presidency is documented in his autobiography (Ould Daddah 2003). It was a case of France guarding its “pré carré” as clearly stated by M’Boye Ould Arafa, a retired high-level public servant and close friend of the researcher:

Ould Daddah was educated, prepared and at first guided by France. France put him in the position [of President] to take over the baton from the colonial power [and to continue their rule].⁷⁸

Moktar Ould Daddah quickly established himself as a strong autocratic leader. He considered that Mauritania, and Africa in general, was not ready for what he regarded as a wasteful and divisive western-style, multi-party democracy. He correctly predicted that such a political system would easily be usurped by tribal influences, and most especially by the strong, warrior tribes of the north and east whose powerbase and activities was being curtailed by the modernisation of the country and its new political management. Ould Daddah

⁷⁷ Photo gallery: Photos 15 and 16

⁷⁸ Interview 28H with M’Boye Ould Arafa, 21 April 2011 and Photo 14

thus saw himself as an agent of change that sought to reduce potential instability caused by the coming together of the modern and traditional realms of governance, by being autocratic.

However, in this fledgling state and because of the Maure tribes' strength and influence over the individual, the senators and deputies of the government were for the most part still composed of traditional Bidân chiefs appointed for their influence over the tribes. Comparatively few Afro-Mauritanians were selected to represent regions of the Senegal River Valley that had a predominant black population. The very divisive forces that Ould Daddah had warned against infiltrated the new regime and were eventually to be used by Ould Daddah himself. The traditional elites resisted the system of one-party rule that Ould Daddah was putting in place, in defence of a social and political system much older than the state and the power groups continued to deal with dominant elites in semi-traditional fashion (Villasante-de Beauvais 1998, 141). Thus, while attacking the traditional power structures of chiefdom and that of the National Assembly made up of these nobles, Ould Daddah used aspects of that old power-base to augment personal power until his overthrow in 1978. By the mid-1970s, all of the concerned political participants, including French ex-colonial powers, saw that Mauritania would not continue to function under a system of one-man rule, and would soon be overrun by Morocco, with its intentions over the territory. It must be remembered that Morocco had always minimised the formation of the state of Mauritania as "... un drapeau, une hymne et un grand méchoui"⁷⁹ (Ould Daddah 2003, 208). This situation, as put by the historian Isselmou Abdelkader, was considered "unacceptable by French ex-colonial powers"⁸⁰.

To the late 1960s, nevertheless, Ould Daddah was fully aware of his reason for keeping good relations with France:

⁷⁹ Literally, 'merely' consisting of the raising of a flag, the singing of a national anthem and a big celebratory meal

⁸⁰ Interview 48A with ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

Mauritania [was] particularly weak. To the North, its very existence [was] seriously threatened by Morocco...To the South; Senegal [threatens us]... To the East, Mali [disputes our territory...] we [could not] defend ourselves and for this reason, we [have to] cling onto France and do nothing that might upset her.⁸¹

France gives us a flag and a national anthem! So be it! However, it [was] understood by all that nothing [would] change in our relationship with it.⁸²

However, Ould Daddah did eventually alienate France, through the nationalisation of the French iron ore mine in the north of the country in 1974. This gained Ould Daddah political favour with his own people at a critical time when the political elites erroneously believed their country to be strong and ready to expand by annexing part of Western Sahara. Another issue was the independent promotion and signature of fishing agreements with other major nations' fishing fleets over some of the richest fishing grounds in the world. These policies were not appreciated by France, and for a time, France withdrew its support and advice in Mauritania's dealings with militarily and politically much stronger Morocco and Algeria.

By the mid-1970s, led by its pragmatic President Ould Daddah and through the political rapprochement to its Maghreb neighbours, Mauritania decisively turned towards reasserting its Arab roots.

Although there is some disagreement among the politicians interviewed, it is evident that Ould Daddah alienated the elders and traditional leaders in the Bidân society who increasingly viewed the President as a threat to their traditional power. They notably resented his truism that tribalism had divided the Maures and facilitated the entry of a foreign power, each accusing the other of destroying Bidân hegemony in assisting France, the colonial power (Ould Daddah 2003, 105).

⁸¹ Ould Daddah 2003, p 164

⁸² Op. cit., p 206

Drought and forced urbanisation

As the state of Mauritania was emerging as a fledgling political entity in Africa, major droughts in the early 1970s drove the nomad Bidân and their black Maure slaves into the fledgling capital of Nouakchott, as well as into the principally Black-populated towns of the Senegal River valley. The massive movement of population because of deteriorating climatic and associated socio-economic conditions brought growing social tensions between ethnicities over the distribution of wealth.

As this climate-related social change occurred, the existing Bidân feudal social structure also changed. Bidân masters, who had ruled a retinue of slaves from their nomad tents, had to move into urban houses⁸³. Survival within a regulated social system of exchange based on monetary value rapidly propagated a more commercial mentality throughout the newly settled population. The abolition of slavery and the shift to urban living changed the relations between Bidân and Haratin. While the latter were legally free to seek employment where they wished, many continued to work in quasi-master-servant relations, for their former Bidân masters who had adjusted to a new mode of living and production of wealth.

The largest part of the freed slave population⁸⁴, generally having no possessions and no recognised social standing became a pool of cheap labour. They formed a new urban social class called “Haratin” (singular, “Hartani” or “ex-slave”) and their numbers, already large, swelled to represent 40% to 45% of the Mauritanian population (Ould Saleck 2003, 12). This large population is considered a potential but unrealised political force, an important factor in Mauritania’s present socio-political landscape and a potential driver of future political change⁸⁵. In particular, the Bidân consider the Haratin a threat to their

⁸³ Photo gallery: contrast Photo 1, 17 and 18

⁸⁴ The time of the great drought, the late 1960s to late 1970s, was a period of voluntary release of slaves. This practice, entrenched in the Bidân and Peulh society has survived until today in spite of increasingly stronger attempts at abolishing the practice in 1905, 1981 and 2007

⁸⁵ Photo gallery: Photo 20

hegemonic socio-political dominance, as inequalities in the distribution of national wealth between white Maures and Afro-Mauritanians is believed to have the same roots as the inequality between Bidân and Haratani. This apprehension is especially felt today, with the “triumphant” return on 23 October 2013 of Samba Thiam, the exiled President of the radical Afro-Mauritanian movement FLAM, and his public declarations of “national ambitions” after meeting Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, Haratin and president of the National Assembly (Cissé, 2013).

As the devastating, decade-long drought took hold in the late 1960s, the urban population changed. The predominantly Afro-Mauritanian population declined to about 30% by the late 1970s, as the stream of Bidân and newly freed slaves fleeing desertification into urban centres continued unabated for ten years. The freed Black slaves, or Haratin, as well as those still attached to their original masters, now constituted 40% to 45% of the urban population. This large population of Blacks, over which the Bidân were determined to maintain their dominance, rang alarm bells in the white Maure population and in the leader of the new State. With a common “racial” heritage, and a common religion, the only “ethnic” parameter that separated and kept Afro-Mauritanians and Haratin from becoming a socio-political behemoth – as perceived by the Bidân – was their separate language; French was spoken by the river valley Blacks and Arabic was spoken by the Black Maures (Ogot 2012, 91). In view of the chasm between Bidân and Black sub-national identities, President Ould Daddah found it difficult to promote a sense of “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) centred on a new Mauritanian national identity⁸⁶. The Haratin continue to have strong ties to their former masters and retain a strong sense of superiority as “Arabs” over Afro-Mauritanians. At the same time, there is growing Afro-Mauritanian-Haratin competition for work and economic security in the city centres. These, and other factors, militate against the growth of a stronger sense of civic belonging to a new state, contrary to what Anderson refers to as an imagined community,

⁸⁶ Interview 11A with the late ex-Senator Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

where “... regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail..., the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1991, 7).

Ould Daddah’s attempts to build a multi-ethnic community appeared to be genuine as there is no evidence that he sought to introduce any discriminatory ethnic policies at the time. Nonetheless, he states in “La Mauritanie, contre vents et marées” that:

The bi-ethnic composition of Mauritania is a reality that no leader can ignore without the risk of jeopardising the very existence of the country. Its recognition and acknowledgement by Mauritanian officials are essential for the construction of a Mauritanian motherland based on solid foundation.⁸⁷

Ould Daddah recognised that ethnicity would continue to play a major role in Mauritanian politics. Except for a few passing comments, however, he failed to address the situation of the Haratin in the post-slavery context and their increasing demographic dominance in the cities. Many elite and non-elite Afro-Mauritanians that took part in the present research, nevertheless, considered that Ould Daddah, at least at the beginnings of the republic, regarded Afro-Mauritanians (Peulh, Soninké, Wolof and Bambara) as equals to the Bidân. He sought to create equal opportunities for them in both government and quasi-government positions, evidenced in the mix of typical ethnic names in listings of government postings of the time. As explained by Ly Ciré⁸⁸, a highly educated Peulh and the son of a high-ranking Senegalese government elite, whose father at the time and for personal reasons, was closely following ethnic developments in Mauritania:

⁸⁷ Ould Daddah 2003, page 151

⁸⁸ Ly Ciré, a Peulh and long-time colleague, dedicated over 14 hours of recorded time in thirteen interview sessions (Interviews 07A to 07M, 6 April to 7 December 2011 and Photo gallery: Photo 12). He provided background historical knowledge and offered his opinions on some socio-political characteristics of Mauritanian society, including on the very sensitive subject of the 1989-1991 conflict between Maures and Afro-Mauritanians

Moktar Ould Daddah put Peulh and Soninké [the predominant black ethnicities] everywhere [in the government]. It is only once the coup of 1978 occurred that there was a turnabout.⁸⁹

Ly Ciré's words are echoed by Ould Daddah himself (2003, 296) when he reports that at the time of independence, the majority of public servants were "from the South" (Afro-Mauritanians), a situation which changed as Bidân became increasingly selected to send their children to attend "l'école des Nazaréens"⁹⁰ (op. cit., 65)

Distancing himself from France, the old colonial power, Ould Daddah sought cooperation with other strong partners. Arabisation and the choice of Arabic as the national language, whether intended or not, was considered by many Afro-Mauritanians as a means of marginalising them and keeping Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians separate (Abdoul 2004: 48-49). Despite the desired rapprochement between Mauritania and its Maghreb neighbours, attempts at Arabisation brought about significant problems. From the very beginning of its colonisation efforts, France regarded the Arabisation of its North African colonies threatened its presence in the region (Ould Daddah 2003, 169). However, on 12 January 1966, ignoring the fact that some 30% of the population of Mauritania were non-Arab speaking Afro-Mauritanians, Ould Daddah pushed through a decree to increase the usage of Arabic, or rather the locally spoken dialect Hassaniya, establishing a compulsory Arabic language teaching system in primary and secondary schools. Ly Ciré remembers these days vividly as a schoolboy:

It was [Ould Daddah]. He began this "Arabisation"! He went to France for finance [over and above the 60% of the national budgetary requirement that France was carrying] and was rejected. He then went to the Arabs. He had been getting along very well with my community, the [Afro-Mauritanian] community, the Harpulaar, Soninké, Wolof... All was going well until 1966, at which time things began to go wrong.

⁸⁹ Interview 07M with Peulh bank employee Ly Ciré, 7 December 2011

⁹⁰ Meaning "school of the Nazareans", followers of Jesus Christ the Nazarean or Christians

He was being pushed around by “others”... the people he was dealing with in the Maghreb.⁹¹

Ly Ciré suggests that Ould Daddah was pressured into arabising the country as the price of greater support from Muslim states. Daddah was aware of this but in his memoirs states he resisted this pressure. He states:

...a wish for total Arabisation of the Mauritania administration ... is not logical in view of the multiethnic nature of the country, and of its geographical position adjacent to Senegal and Mali that are both Francophone.⁹²

In response to the language decree, in February 1966, the new capital Nouakchott saw its first serious racial confrontations between Hassaniya-speaking Bidân students (backed by uneducated Arab-speaking Haratin) and French-speaking black African students of the Wolof, Soninké and Peulh ethnic affiliations. Although the decree was not rejected, the government realised that it should have taken heed of the ethnic diversity of the population, pulling back on moves to arabise all primary schools and much of secondary school teaching (Abdelkader 2008, 34). It placated the Afro-Mauritanians, but language differences remain to this day and continue to be a source of marginalisation for Afro-Mauritanians, a catalyst for dissent. To this day, language remains a source of continuing political instability, and a symptom of a wider rift along racial-*cum*-ethnic lines.

In that same period, Ould Daddah continued to attack the “traditional” powerbase of Mauritania. In the earliest days of the new republic, the majority of Bidân were still living nomadically in the interior of the country. Nouakchott was a fishing village of some 2,000 inhabitants until 5 March 1958 when it was officially selected as the capital of Mauritania. It grew from a village in the early 1960s to a population of some 135,000 by the late-1970s (Villasante-de Beauvais 1998, 153)⁹³. The political order remained strongly

⁹¹ interview Q07L with banker Ly Ciré, interviewed 7 December 2011

⁹² Ould Daddah 2003, page 297

⁹³ Today, Nouakchott has a population of over 1.5 million or almost 50% of the country's citizens

based on segmentary and fractional divisions within the nomadic Bidân tribal system, with each tribe and their tributaries voting “en masse” in western-style elections according to a chief’s selection. Despite Ould Daddah’s efforts to reduce tribalism, the formation of the state itself was based on support from tribal groups, the importance and even the presence of which was vehemently denied in public (Abdoul 2004, 54-57).

The Drought of the 1970s

The major drought of the late 1960s and 1970s was a pivotal factor in forcing the vast majority (possibly up to 98%) of the nomadic Bidân tribes with their tributaries and slaves, to leave their traditional desert way of life and move to the capital, Nouakchott, and to towns along the Senegal River valley. The event both strengthened and weakened the power structure of traditional chiefs and of the newly formed state. On the one hand, the distribution of government aid and food could not have occurred without the support of the chiefs who used this opportunity for broader political ends. At the same time, the shift to the town led to the creation of new communities that sometimes transcended traditional tribal clan groups or segments and appeared to decrease the power of the traditional chiefs.⁹⁴

Some of the more significant outcomes of the early 1970s drought were those ensuing from pressure on ownership and use of agricultural lands along the Senegal floodplains. Traditional land usage had never been officially recorded in written form, apportioned by tribal chiefs under old rituals, altered over the centuries by practices based on the Sunni Malekite legal code. This apportionment implied legal ownership of land, but only through membership of a tribe and, most significantly, along specific patrilineal lines. This arrangement implied that even sons of slave-women could own land, although in practice they were apportioned less fertile areas of the flood plain compared to the Black tribes or the new Bidân proprietors. Yet, in the early 1970s, of deeper concern to the ruling Bidân elites, was the growing number of freed

⁹⁴ Interview 48A with ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

slaves, or Haratin, who settled en-masse in more remote corners of the fertile valley or became tradesmen in the major centres.

The abolition of slavery had been formally advanced in independent Mauritania for the first time, in October 1961 when the government joined the United Nations (UN) and ratified the UN's Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man. This gave grounds for the President to change Mauritanian society "from the top", stifling tribal dominance over tributaries and introducing new ideas and practices. Ould Daddah did attempt to give greater legal and political rights to the wider population, moving away from preferential statutory treatment and the tribal segmentary feuds that led to bitter divisions as climatic conditions worsened. The stated aim was to form a nation in which all individuals were free and equal with a direct link to the State and without intervening traditional social and political structures. He at first imagined a semi-presidential representative, democratic system similar to that of France, with himself as President and head of state and a Prime Minister as head of government, a position he soon abolished. His guiding proposals to the dominant political party he headed at pre-independence were at first ridiculed by the traditional elites in and affiliated to the party (Ould Daddah 2003, 154). Eventually, his proposition was accepted by the party, but only because of strong support given by Yvon Razac, Administrator of the French colonies in West Africa and Director of Political Affairs in Mauritania at the time. This support came on Ould Daddah's declaration to resign from the party if his proposals were rejected (Ould Daddah 2003, 102).

By the mid-1970s, there was growing realisation by the Bidân elites that the Hartani, comprising some 40% of the population, might rediscover their African roots, siding with the Afro-Mauritanians and upsetting the balance of power. If rapprochement occurred between the Blacks, that is, between the Haratin and the Afro-Mauritanian communities, the latter constituting up to 30% of the population, the balance of power could indeed shift, which would threaten the Bidân's long-standing social and political dominance (Ould Saleck 2003, 144).

Ould Daddah's objective of creating a modern and more egalitarian society by the 1980s, translated into moves towards formal government decrees abolishing slavery that were eventually signed in 1981. The continued emphasis on Arabic as an official language, which was used by both the Haratin and Bidân, as well as by their mostly uneducated and still servile black slaves, was the wedge used by the Bidân elites aware of the possible if distant threat of political alliances between the two black communities. The division was further widened by the Bidân in the late 1980s, contributing significantly to the precipitation of the 1989 crisis.

Drought was a key factor in initiating rapid change in the Mauritanian socio-political system. It brought about a change in commercial and economic activities throughout the society, now not solely based in the traditional tributary system, but driven by more commercial and capitalist demands of wealth creation. It altered the interaction of the state with the tribal system of the Bidân, between the various Bidân tribes, as well as between the Bidân and the Haratin, their former slaves. The unprecedented and massive movement to a sedentary lifestyle changed the interaction of the Bidân amongst themselves, as well as altering their interactions with the Afro-Mauritanian population. It altered the relation of free men and women, ex-slaves and those that until then were still considered as slaves. It created a large pool of dissatisfied, young people with no gainful means of activity. This included young, underprivileged Bidân from "smaller" tribes, Afro-Mauritanians, as well as their ex-slaves or sons of ex-slaves scrambling to make a living by adapting to a different set of commercial and social circumstances in the new urban society.

The divide between 'blacks' and 'whites' had arisen out of the Bedouin social hierarchy based on political bonds and as a labour control mechanism within a multi-ethnic setting. This black-white division now began to acquire more radicalised overtones. The similarity between the Arab word "abd", meaning "slave" or "servant", the word "abid", meaning "black", attests to the long

established lowly social position for the people of black origins in traditional societies. Based on this language-rooted evidence, it can be assumed that such “racial” divisions pre-date the European slave trade and the European racial discourse of the 19th century.

Thus in 1957 the stage was set for the Bidân to dominate within the new, purportedly egalitarian society declared by President Ould Daddah early in his political career:

Mauritania will no longer be this vast desert once so difficult to cross.... Tomorrow, our country will have the place it deserves in this [new] world. It will be a country with a modern economy, wisely and democratically managing its own affairs through capable elite.... [It will be] A country that, resting on its most eminent doctor of "Islam," sees its spiritual authority universally recognised [a reference to the pre-eminence of the Zawiya elites]... With Allah's help, Mauritania will tomorrow be a meeting-place where men of all background, all civilizations and all cultures, will meet and live peacefully together.⁹⁵

The rhetoric of equality and legal rights for all contrasted with the actual ethnically and economically based inequalities that continued to characterise the society. The Bidân, as well as wealthier Peulh, continued slave practices and many black Mauritians were treated as property rather than legally free agents, voters and the legal equals of all others.

Western Sahara: “La Grande Erreur”

The annexing of the Spanish-controlled Western Sahara into a “Greater Mauritania” had been on Ould Daddah’s mind for a long time. He considered the Western Sahara population as nomads with the same religion, culture and language as those that inhabited the desert of northern Mauritania, as well as seeing Western Sahara as a ‘natural’ extension of their nomadic desert realm. In the eyes of the *grands nomads*, this was largely correct, as they continued

⁹⁵ Part of Moktar Ould Daddah’s 1957 speech as newly elected Vice-President of the national political party, quoted in Ould Daddah (2003)

to move across what they saw as arbitrary state frontiers set by foreigners. As early as July 1957, newly elected Vice-President of a fledgling Mauritanian Territorial Assembly, Ould Daddah spoke about this union. He implied that such a union was natural and desired by all inhabitants, including “our brothers from the Spanish Sahara”. He considered the partition of the two groups to be meaningless and indeed almost immoral, dividing those “of the same tent” (Ould Daddah 2003, 5).

In 1975, the Spanish dictator General Franco died, and Spain began a process of decolonisation from its overseas territories. It relinquished control of Western Sahara and turned it over to Morocco and Mauritania at the Madrid Accords in November 1975. This generated a violent uprising by the Western Saharan Sahrawi National Liberation Movement, unexpected by Ould Daddah. The Polisario, as the Sahrawi National Liberation Movement became known, attacked what it saw as the new African colonialists at their weakest point, Mauritania’s national capital and the iron-ore mine of Zouérat, the principal source of national income. Gaye Silly Soumaré puts it this way:

Mauritania claimed Western Sahara as part of its territory and Moroccans demanded the same...When Mauritania and Morocco finally agreed and signed a secret agreement [with Spain] for the devolution of Western Sahara and agreed to share the territory, war against us began...

The Polisario was strong, but in fact, it was Algeria [we were fighting against]. Algeria was waging war against Mauritania through...the Polisario...

It was a war over an extended length of the Atlantic shoreline... That was the real reason why Algeria participated, and especially opposed Morocco... There was a border dispute between them...between Algeria and Morocco... However, more importantly, Algeria also wanted to have direct access to the Atlantic Ocean...It was the Atlantic Ocean that was key... [Iron ore, phosphate and petroleum]...to national resource wealth, it influenced this conflict... The mining industry influenced this conflict. There are extensive deposits of iron ore, phosphate and oil shale in this region. It had a very significant impact on the desire to

control this region. Moreover, there is the Atlantic deep-water port of Ad Dakhla [that is of major strategic importance for the loading and evacuation of these bulk minerals].

[The Algerians] also wanted to oppose the Moroccan expansion and obviously, that was the concern of Mauritania. In addition, [the Algerians] were seeking direct access to the Atlantic Ocean, which would allow them to have access to the sea for their ore export, for their oil and their gas. There is also iron-ore maybe, in the Tindouf region.⁹⁶

Forced sedentarisation of the nomadic Maure and Peulh tribes because of the early 1970s drought had created a large pool of unemployed youth in the main urban centres. President Ould Daddah's drew on this growing pool of young unemployed men as part of his move to strengthen the armed forces, which until then, he had deliberately kept small for his presidential security. The armed forces rapidly swelled in numbers from 3,000 to 30,000.

Mauritania was the only ex-colony of French West Africa which had not built a professional army and even with many officers training in France, the army was poorly equipped and weak, being made up of zealous, but poorly trained Haratin and Afro-Mauritanian soldiers often led by equally poorly trained Afro-Mauritanian officers.. The Afro-Mauritanians and newly freed slaves had readily volunteered to join the army "on the call of the nation", most likely for the ready employment it provided. The Bidân, on the other hand, had not moved to join the army "en masse" and when some joined at the beginning of the Western Sahara War, tensions mounted, as they could not adjust to serving under black officers. By 1978, however, the number of top black officers had effectively been reduced, replacing the meritocratic model to one "perfectly adapted to the specific realities of Mauritania" (Ould Daddah 2003, 392).

By February 1978, 10,000 Moroccan soldiers were stationed throughout Mauritania, to "help and give protection" (Foster 2011, 26) and in 1977 the French air force under Operation Lamantin gave strong support by attacking

⁹⁶ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 4 April 2011

Polisario military incursions into Mauritanian territory (Pazzanita 2008, 537). France gave this support despite strong dissatisfaction with Ould Daddah's growing relationships with communist China, with the Arab League and particularly with Morocco. For President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Mauritania's impasse played into French hands. Ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader put it this way:

Mauritania could not win the war without the strong involvement...of France. However, there was something more fundamental. The cooperation between Ould Daddah and the Moroccans had reached a point that very much bothered the French!

There is something almost fundamental and permanent in French politics. In French politics, what is permanent is that... They do not wish for Morocco to cooperate too closely with Mauritania. That's a given...Because they think that Morocco...is already too influential a country, and has too great nationalistic ambitions. It is an Arab country. This country had been the starting point to the invasion of Europe, in the 8th century! Do you understand?

The French have therefore always wanted to keep Mauritania as a buffer zone, a neutral region that would not fall under either the influence of Algeria or that of Morocco.⁹⁷

The drive for personal and national recognition from his Maghreb neighbours, Algeria and Morocco, as well as his desire for national acceptance in the Arab world, caused Ould Daddah to equivocate in his relations with Morocco and Algeria (Ould Daddah 2003, 451-480). The eventual decision to side with Morocco, and thus ignore President Boumediene's warning that Algeria would support the Sahrawi Polisario against Morocco and Mauritania, resulted in a protracted and abortive war. The President also alienated many Mauritania's with the Moroccan alliance and, as the war progressed, with the tacit support he gave to France's attacks on Polisario forces in support of a weakened Mauritania. Many of the Sahrawi killed by the French in these raids

⁹⁷ Interview 48A with Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

were relatives of northern Mauritians. Moreover, the Mauritanian armed forces felt humiliated by their inability to defend their country and blamed the President for their predicament.

This dissatisfaction of the army directly led to Ould Daddah's overthrow in July 1978. Many Hartani and Afro-Mauritians, as well as some Bidân conscripts had been drafted into the army and given their lives in the north of Mauritania. The presidency of Moktar Ould Daddah was discussed at length with ex-Ambassador Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody, a Maure of reputed Smacide Hartani origin, and Mauritania's ambassador to the United States for many years:

The "Great Fall" of Ould Daddah was his persistence since 1957, to wish and to say that Western Sahara was part of Mauritania. His 1957 speech on "unification" as he called it....Yes, I was there...at the time I was in Grade 6....Ould Daddah was persistent on this idea of unification with Western Sahara. In fact, I do not understand totally. The Sahrawi, overall, did not wish to be unified with Mauritania. The Oualad Delim, who inhabited the Sahara as well as the North of Mauritania, in fact, did not wish to be "unified"....To me, this was the great error of Ould Daddah, this drive for unification, this war. This is what brought Ould Daddah down....

In 1976, the "War of the Sahara" was in full swing.... This war plunged Mauritania in a situation that was unexpected. She thought that she would merely be confronting [some minor militant] Sahrawi nomads. She in fact was faced with Algeria....It was a fatal error... a fatal error [on the part of President Ould Daddah] that could have brought down Mauritania...The coup d'état that took place in 1978 [and overthrew the president], even if Ould Daddah was charismatic, intelligent, etc... This coup saved Mauritania! It ended the war.⁹⁸

For Mauritania, 1978 was a difficult year. In spite of the desire to make Mauritania a "united country, with solidarity and brotherhood, prosperity,

⁹⁸ Interview with ex-Ambassador Saïd Ould Hamody, 13 December 2011. Photo 11

considered and respected by the world” (Ould Daddah, 2003, 403) the President was toppled from power.

The specific incident that led to the overthrow of President Moktar Ould Daddah came because he attacked Bidân elites within his own government for graft and corruption. In a presidential career-destroying move echoed by President Abdallahi in 2008, Ould Daddah campaigned against graft. He fired two ministers and threatened several senior army officers (Foster 2012, 27), upsetting the tribal balance agreed to by elite elders. Ould Daddah had also recently appointed Colonel Mustapha Ould Mohamed Saleck as Army Chief of Staff in January 1978, a career army officer from a Beni Hassan warrior tribe from the east. As a member of a warrior Beni Hasan tribe, Colonel Saleck was at odds with the reasoned and diplomatic approach to life of an individual from a maraboutic tribe of the south. The security and the economic situation of Mauritania rapidly worsened and elites as well as the general population became increasingly alarmed. This precipitated Ould Daddah’s deposition by Colonel Saleck on 10 July 1978, who had no close relationship with his President. The President was replaced by a military council with the support of the French. Many believe that there was strong involvement of “external forces” in the political upheavals that occurred then, and subsequently, in Mauritania.

In all three cases, Ould Babana, Ould Daddah, [and later] Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya, we say that there has [to be] external influences.... [With] Babana, there was fear...we did not want people from outside [interfering with our politics], but the French backed Ould Daddah and Ould Babana left. We did not want [but!] there is very likely “something external” that brought Ould Daddah and which also took Ould Daddah away.

The French were...in it. Did someone become “bothered” with Ould Daddah [and his politics] in the end? Was it the French President Valerie Giscard d’Estaing]?

Yes, perhaps the French once again...In 1978, it is the French who [backed] Saleck.⁹⁹

The eighteen years of Moktar Ould Daddah's presidency and the subsequent six years of military rule, which ended the disruptive attempt at annexation of Western Sahara, was a period in which the state of Mauritania begun to take form quite rapidly and became recognised on the world stage. The late Gaye Silly Soumaré, a young minister within Moktar Ould Daddah's government asserted that:

Indeed, [in the beginning] Mauritians did not have a very clear idea of the meaning of "the State" at that time... They were more or less independent tribes...Bedouin tribes such as my own sedentary tribes [Seré and Sarakolé] and the nomad [Maure and Peulh] tribes...For a time the tribes got along fairly well...Moorish and African.¹⁰⁰

In summary, the first President of Mauritania, Moktar Ould Daddah, elected on 20 August 1961, was deposed in a coup d'état on 10 July 1978. The clear conviction held by the majority of Mauritanian government elites and many ordinary Mauritanian citizens, was that France played a pivotal part in Ould Daddah's downfall. France's involvement is downplayed but acknowledged by ex-president Ould Daddah himself:

Given the following events in Mauritania, some have asked whether France took any part in the putsch of 10 July 1978.... Not being in possession of direct positive information, I gather that France was an accomplice by omission....

My overthrow offered France an elegant opportunity to disengage from the Saharan conflict.... [In view of France's relationship with Francophone African presidents and its promises of help towards independence and democracy]...To go back on its promise [by interfering] in Mauritania, would have been for France to discourage its African friends and once more lose, their confidence in the promised

⁹⁹ Interview 48A with Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

¹⁰⁰ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

protection of the “French umbrella“.... A change of political regime in Nouakchott, of course, a change they would not be actively involved with, but which they would “allow” to take place, seemed the best solution that would allow France to withdraw without any undue effect from the conflict in the Sahara....

Having been taken out of the picture, the Mauritanian army would retire from the war and there would be no talk of reunification [between Western Sahara and Mauritania].¹⁰¹

President Ould Daddah’s overthrow furnished France with a way of avenging itself for Mauritania’s nationalisation of its iron ore mine at Zouérat. It also allowed it to extricate itself from a situation that had forced it to take sides between a strong Moroccan nation, and an Algeria that was becoming a significant world-player in the petroleum industry. Both Morocco and Algeria were valuable neighbours, albeit both watched with some geopolitical caution. Geopolitically of importance, petroleum resources did not play a part in this coup d’état, although a tenuous link may be argued through the delicate game of ‘cat-and-mouse’ France was playing with Algeria over its petroleum riches, at the time.

The “Reign of the Colonels”

Between 1978 and 1984, four military regimes ruled for various lengths of time, each in turn changed by coup d’états. These coups were sudden depositions of the ruling body of military elites by small factions within the military establishment. The ruling body of elites was in each case replaced with a differing set of military elites, but the system remained the same.

Mustapha Ould Saleck, the new president after Ould Daddah, was a Bidân from eastern Mauritania, and head of a military Junta dominated by Bidân (the CMRN or Comité Militaire de Redressement National). As Head of State, as of 20 March 1979, he appeared to reconcile with pro-Algeria France. Saleck failed, however, in his attempts to reconcile with the Polisario, whose

¹⁰¹ Ould Daddah 2003, pages 548 -550

members are related to the northeastern warrior Bidân tribes, the Ould Delim. Disquiet increased in Mauritania as Ould Saleck focussed on Arabisation and failed to address racial tensions between French-speaking Afro-Mauritanians and Hassaniya-speaking Bidân (Ould El Haycen 2009). Ould El Haycen, a respected political writer, states that Ould Saleck was deposed as head of the Junta on April 6 1979 because of dissatisfaction within the military elites.

This [was a] difficult and impossible situation, fruit[s] of alliances ‘against nature’ {perhaps referring to unusual tribal alliances}.... In order to keep or eliminate opponents would result in the sudden departure from power of Colonel Moustapha Ould Saleck.... Thus, the bond that officers had formed on 10 July 1978 [with the overthrow of President Ould Daddah] rapidly fell apart, opening the way to the formation of factions and differing ways of thinking that were emerging within the army. This brought Mauritania “in the eye of the storm” for a very long time, full of surprises, reversal of friendships or of alliances, betrayals as well as violence among fellow citizens.¹⁰²

The coup that ousted Ould Saleck was carried out by Colonels Ahmad Ould Bouceif and Mohamed Khouna Haidallah. Tribal rivalry was the main motive behind it, and the question of natural resources and derived revenues were of no direct significance at the time. Bouceif was from a southern-based semi-nomadic and Maraboutic tribe, while Ould Haidallah hailed from a nomadic, warrior tribe of the Ould Delim group from the far north and was related to the Sahrawi tribes of Western Sahara. Ould Bouceif, reputed to have been the preferred successor to Saleck, was killed under suspicious circumstances in an airplane accident in Dakar in May 1979, one month after the coup. His possible murder may have been motivated by tribal rivalries since he too originated from the southwest, as had Saleck, and would favour the relationships:

¹⁰² Ould El Haycen 2009, page 83

Unfortunately, the reign of Colonel Ahmed Ould Bouceif experienced a regrettable and tragic end...not adequately investigated and which remains inexplicable in many respects.¹⁰³

Ould Bouceif was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Louly, also from a semi-nomadic southern maraboutic tribe. He became Chairman of a renamed military Junta and Head of State on 3 June 1979. Ould Louly also did not last long and was unceremoniously ousted on 4 January 1980 and replaced by the northerner, Prime Minister Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah. Haidallah had disagreed many times with Ould Louly concerning relations with Ould Louly's southern "small nomads", a traditional dichotomy of ideas and beliefs between warriors and marabouts. In view of Haidallah's northern roots, it is not clear whether he disfavoured a close relationship with the Moroccans in opposition to Louly's most likely political position. It is more likely that close relations with the Polisario and the Sahrawi tribes began to flourish once again. This together with his strong Islamic and pro-Arab leaning as well as a rapprochement to the Algerians alarmed France and clear evidence exists for France's involvement in his overthrow by his Prime Minister Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed (Ould) Taya.

While the 1978-overthrow of Ould Daddah was aided by the French, but precipitated by a need for Mauritania to extricate itself from the Western Sahara war, the two palace coups that occurred in the overthrows of Ould Saleck and Ould Louly were driven primarily by inter-tribal differences:

Despite taking all possible measures, President Moustapha had not been able to take control of the rudder and redress the drifting ship of state... He was undeservingly "disembarked at the dock" by his new colleagues without having been able to come to grips with the situation.... He was removed from power, but he went from his brief presidential tour with a clear conscience and a quiet resignation, ousted by the devouring ambitions of his army compatriots.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ould El Haycen 2009, page 92

¹⁰⁴ Ould El Haycen 2009, page 92

The political leanings of the Mauritanian elites vacillated between pro-Polisario (and therefore pro-Algeria and pro-French), and losing the backing of the French because they had the tacit approval of Morocco in the partitioning of Western Sahara. The seesaw politics ended with the 12 December 1984 overthrow of Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah. This palace coup was led by Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, Prime Minister at the time and initially against the annexation of Western Sahara to Mauritania. This resolved a thorny issue, Ould Taya's government renouncing any claim to the territory:

In 1978, the army has become a very strong socio-political and economic class, increasingly dominated by the Bidân. Therefore, you see, between 1978 and 1984, there were a lot of coups and palace revolutions... [And] There was a succession [of Bidân army leaders]... [Saleck], Louly, Bouceif... [Haidallah]... And up to Maaouya [Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya]. There was [continuous] instability at the top of the state. It was related to the pro-Moroccan to pro-Polisario [seesaw]... The [tribal] links [of the leaders] were with Morocco [or] Algeria and Western Sahara, [and that] created instability.¹⁰⁵

Internal political turbulence had marked Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah's period as head of state¹⁰⁶. Measures to have slavery abolished were cosmetic as in reality they merely reflected the need of Bidân masters to rid themselves of tribal obligations towards their former slaves. Haidallah also brought in land tenure reforms, passed in 1983, to regularise and modernise the development of the fertile agricultural lands along the Senegal River (Pazzanita 2008, 289-292). These reforms, however, were seen by the sedentary and traditional Afro-Mauritanian occupants as a land grab by the Bidân to commercialise land that had been family-owned by Blacks for centuries, creating yet another reason for the fault-lines in the Mauritanian socio-political landscape.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 37A with anonymous Afro-Mauritanian history Professor, 14 December 2011

¹⁰⁶ Photo gallery: Photo 19

The land grab could have been an opportunity for the possession of land by exploited labourers and impoverished tenant farmers, principally made up of Haratin. The reality, however, was that as well as helping shift ownership to new Bidân owners (who continued to use cheap Haratin labour) the move began to fan the flames of Arabisation and resentment, which worsened the conflict between French-speaking Afro-Mauritanians and Arabic-speaking Haratin. Additionally, the passing of Sharia Law by Haidallah, a fervent but moderate Islamist (as he continues to be to this day) did not go down well with the former colonial power. An impromptu interview with Mohamed Lemine Ould Abdallah, long-time political dissident exiled between 2002 and 2009, and member of the activist movement, “25 février”, gave insight on this part of Mauritania’s history:

It is widely known that Haidallah...at one of the meetings where all the presidents from the former French colonies meet with the French President said”...we are sick of the French language! We are going to [establish] English [as the official language]...ok?” ...He had indeed thought that at a certain time, but it is at this time that the French began to distance themselves from him...and helped [Taya] with the [12 December 1984] coup....

There were several reasons why Haidallah was [not appreciated by the French]... There was Sharia [law].... He was pro-Algerian...pro-Polisario [and contrarily on the side of the French since they opposed Morocco’s claim to an expanded territory]... Sharia changed [Mauritanian society]... However, [the application of Sharia] was also [a move] against the poor [Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians]... Do you understand what I mean? Haidallah began to preach on the practice of Islam, and began with that. [The application of] Sharia law [however]...was brutal... If you were stopped [by the police], they may denounce you as [a thief], and cut your hand or “shave tips” for women, torturing people who drink alcohol, etc... But this Sharia which [Haidallah] had applied to the Mauritanian people was not applicable to everyone evenly...They may cut off the hand of this one [pointing to a Hartani working in his shop] but this one may not have his hand cut off [pointing to a Bidân passing by]...

Overnight, you cannot adjust a country that yesterday was a free and sovereign state, where everybody drank [alcohol] and where a liberal system was in place... In the time of Moktar Ould Daddah, there were clubs and discotheques everywhere... [With Haidallah], you now begin to beat people as if it were Afghanistan! It should not have been like that.... The fact was that many people thought he would make Sharia law applied to everyone...create an egalitarian society... [He did not] apply it evenly, using it only to persecute the poor [the Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians]... That meant that many people were now against it and against Haidallah, and there were many attempted coups against him...

France realised that within their ‘pré carré’ a majority of people were now against Haidallah and that there was internal dissent... Additionally, having made an enemy of François Mitterrand, and [ridiculed] French politics... [Haidallah] had added to his problems....

You should know that the French are smart; they will not do “things” without consulting their Mauritanian [political allies].¹⁰⁷

Col. Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah, Head of State and Chairman of the Military Committee for National Salvation between January 1980 and December 1984, was a strong man from a nomadic tribe from the northern reaches of Mauritania and southern Western Sahara who sought to reconcile his country with Algeria and the Polisario.

With this pro-Algeria turn in international relations, Mauritania once again angered Morocco, almost coming into open warfare. Indeed, Morocco was again ready to annex the whole of the Mauritanian territory to the Senegal River. This may have happened, had not France been ever watchful of Morocco becoming too strong a Mediterranean force. As the pro-Arab and autocratic style of Haidallah also did not go down well with France, it is widely believed by Mauritians that France was implicated in his removal as Head of State on 12 December 1984 by Col. Maaouya Ould Sid’ Ahmed Taya.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 50B with Mohamed Lemine Ould Abdallah, 2 January 2012

Isselmou Abdelkader, as a historian, political observer and writer, gives credence to Mohamed Lemine Ould Abdallah's insight on Haidallah:

Haidallah had been overthrown "by the French"... It was very clear... General Jeannou Lacaze, Chief of Staff of the French army, came [to Mauritania] and concocted a scheme with Maaouya [at that time Prime Minister]. They said it had to be a coup while Haidallah was out of the country. They set a date for the summit in Bujumbura and in a short time repaired Haidallah's plane [which had needed repairs for a long time]. They made it easy for him to leave, and managed to remove from the scene for a short period, several key figures in the administration that were pro-Haidallah... In addition, when...Maaouya came, he was "France's man". Everyone knew it.¹⁰⁸

In his study on Mauritania's political development, Noel Foster summarises well the unstable period of military rule from 1978 until 1984:

There were Mauritanian military juntas that took power, each with a self-appointed mandate to redress the country's endemic problems. However, they found themselves unable to resolve them, much less, those they themselves had created... [They] brought their worldviews to the ministries they took over. The point is that they were unschooled, unprepared for governance, and without a political base... Naturally inclined to enter into marriages of convenience with tribal aristocracies...the rise of tribal elites harkened...a veritable period of primitive capital accumulation through the pillage of the state...acts understood in the logic of...a tribalistic worldview, with its own values and morality.¹⁰⁹

The fall of the Ould Delim president, Haidallah, and the ascension of Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya as military head of state on 12 December 1984 were generally hailed by Mauritians as a victory for and by the people. This is affirmed by a majority of participants to the present research that were questioned on this particular aspect of Mauritanian history. Some astute observers among them, nevertheless, also saw the strong hand of the French

¹⁰⁸ Interview 48A with ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

¹⁰⁹ Foster 2011, pages 27 - 31

secret services behind only a handful of young officers. These officers were, it must be emphasised, both Bidân and Afro-Mauritanian, and one of them was the already notable young Captain Ely Mohamed Vall, at the time commander of the sixth military division, a decisive force behind the coup d'état (El Haycen 2009, 133)

From the very beginning of his ascension to power in 1984 until his overthrow in 2005, Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya did attempt to improve Mauritania's poor socio-political and economic performance. He sought to address some of the thornier dilemmas Mauritania faced in joining the modern world: tribalism, fraud and corruption, land tenure, poverty and slavery (Pazzanita 2008, 307-308)¹¹⁰.

Corruption, tribalism and fault-lines

Historically and to this day, racially and ethnically based discrimination has been a central feature of Mauritania's society and has generated considerable discontent among those affected negatively by such an institution. It was exacerbated from the mid-1970s with the urbanisation of the nomad Bidân and their efforts to ensure continued socio-political and economic control of the country.

Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya's presidency in the 1980s saw his tribe and allied tribes and lobbies consolidate their power over formal institutions, such as government, army and police, to wealth-producing institutions and industries such as banks, land resources, fisheries, mining and other activities (Samuel, 2011). It extended to the formation and control of less apparent and informal markets and institutions, such as employment, elite networks, international links, the illegal traffic of cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and arms through the desert and many others. These actions took on an increasingly racialised character with the systematic removal of Afro-Mauritanians from

¹¹⁰ Photo gallery: Photo 20

positions of power, culminating in 1989 in the systematic and organised physical violence wrought against them.

President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya declared in his inaugural speech at the advent of the coup on 12 December 1984, that he would end autocracy, corruption and tribalism, which had paralysed the country. Yet one party rule dominated by Bidân elites continued. In spite of Taya's initial – and in hindsight – weak efforts at curbing tribalism and nepotism, these became entrenched as ex-minister Soumaré explains:

Yes, the Smacides was a small tribe. However, the president, the man who is in power, he does everything for his family in order to gain spoils from state market [opportunities]... In addition [with President Taya], this is how these people became rich... At the beginning, they were not affluent, but they accumulated much wealth with [Taya] while he was in power... There is the example of Abdallah Ould Abdallahi, whose wealth was created by Taya... An uncle of President Ould Taya was from the tribe of Abdallah Ould Abdallahi [and is now one of Mauritania's wealthiest men]. This person benefited from everything that could come from the state... This is [a clear case of] nepotism... The State is the principal source of wealth that Mauritania always has had... You know initially there were no businessmen, there was nobody... The state that gave out all...it is the State that hired people and who gave them work...It was the state therefore that could give wealth to people and [made the Smacides and related Bidân tribes, wealthy tribes with newfound social nobility].¹¹¹

Observed from the “outside” as above by ex-Minister Soumaré, the Bidân's social and political behaviour is seen as entrenching the factional power of the Smacides power in a manner contrary to officially stated aims of greater equality and fairness in government. This contradiction is commented on by ordinary Mauriticians such as a Peulh and a Hartani hotel employee who participated in the research:

¹¹¹ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 4 April 2011

It is rare to see a political leader or anyone like the man at the head of a[n]... administration or ministry to be there for the good of the people...it is also unheard of...Yes, including Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya...Yes...Ould Taya very much favoured his ethnic group. He did a lot for his ethnicity [tribe], the Smacides. He developed [their] city, Atar. He very much helped his relatives and neglected others. As a result, "the others" [Bidân] at some point began to feel frustrated, and this is what led to divisions, coups, petitions, and all that.¹¹²

During the time of Taya, when someone was nominated in the government, that person was nominated not for his or her skill, but for their ethnic membership... There is also a definition [that I give to these people]; "all senior officials who served under Ould Taya, they became so rich that they will never be [poor again] in 50 years"... I give this definition to them!¹¹³

As Foster notes, the failure of the state to provide security and well-being to all its citizens, promoted a sense among many that, it was only through kinship and ethnic relations at the sub-national level that security could be assured. This, in turn, enhanced feelings of solidarity between tribal members and ethnic groups. Foster (211, 320) gives this view:

The modern state itself in these tribes' vision appeared as an alien entity that demanded loyalty and exacted demands while providing few services... Loyalty was [therefore] owed [only] to real entities – one's family, clan, tribe – rather than to imagined communities such as the nation or the state. The state failed to provide services to citizens largely because resources were embezzled, which in turn brought Mauritians to rely even more heavily on tribal solidarity networks that distributed embezzled earnings.¹¹⁴

Greed and grievances intensified and internal strife between Bidân grew in proportion to the systematic embezzlement of public resources that was

¹¹² Interview 23A with Boubacar Athié, 16 April 2011

¹¹³ Interview 22A with Hartani hotel employee Isselmou Mohamed Lemine, 16 April 2011

¹¹⁴ Foster 2011, page 320

occurring to the highest level. Foster attributes this to Maure traditional practices adapted to the new circumstances. He explains:

The Maures view had been shaped by the tradition of *razzias*. This fostered an economic system of redistribution grounded on raiding others and sharing of the loot in the name of tribal solidarity or *Assabiya*¹¹⁵... This tradition was reinvented in an unprecedented fashion in the 1970s... The state, an alien, adversarial entity constituted the most appetising prize, prompting tribes to compete over hijacking it and pillaging its resources for internal allotment... The pretext of *Assabiya* did not occur in the framework of a benevolent tribal welfare state.... As soon as a tribe allied sufficient forces to take over a wing of the government, it disintegrated in internal strife over its spoils, only to be taken over by another tribe with stronger internal cohesion...in a cyclical mechanism of hostile takeovers termed “predatory redistribution,” redirecting national wealth to a handful of tribes.¹¹⁶

However, the worst was yet to come for President Ould Taya. The division between Haratin and Afro-Mauritanian, which had been made wider by the new land reforms, became more intense. Within President Ould Taya’s own tribal and personal circles, there were many who did not approve of his openness and participatory approach towards blacks. Isselmou Abdelkader gives a personal view of his president’s relationship with Afro-Mauritanians, a relationship that, to some of the older Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians known to the researcher, was a natural outcome of the man’s character, and of the relationships that he formed as a young man. As a minister in Taya’s government, Isselmou Abdelkader throws light on the deteriorating relationship with blacks and the increasing paranoia suffered by Taya as an outcome of the ill advice he received from ill-intentioned Bidân politicians:

Taya and I were friends... He was at ease with the blacks, having grown up playing with Hartani and black children. He worried more about

¹¹⁵ Razzias were semi-institutionalised Bedouin traditions of raiding just about anyone within reach including a brother’s tribe, for the pillaging and acquisition of goods, captives and livestock

¹¹⁶ Foster 2011, page 32

certain Bidân elites, who always thought their nemesis were “the blacks”.

This is because at the time of independence, the blacks were in the majority within the public service. They had had long contact with the French, for centuries, as they were sedentary and were settled close to St Louis, it had been easy for the French to deal with them and educate them in the French ways. They knew the French language, whereas, the Maures knew only Arabic... Above all else, they had been made into French citizens, while the Maures had even “snubbed” the French schooling system. The only Maures who did adapt to the French system [of schooling]...were the Oualad Béiri, the “small nomads” from the southwest, a few Smacides [including Taya’s close tribal family], some Idawali, and minor tribal elements of the Oualad Bousba...mainly these merchants that were settled in Senegal.

The Baathists in the Maure society, seeking the dominance of Arab culture in Mauritania, reflected that, “Maaouya is beginning to rely too much on the blacks. This will mean the return of the French language to the exclusion of Arabic and Arabic culture!”

They began to deal with the secret services.... The Iraqi intelligence and Gadhafi’s secret services became involved with them, and they constructed an extraordinary scenario [a trap] for Maaouya....

They began by involving...the National Security Corps, at the time under the leadership of Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, who was among the many military officers sympathetic to the Arab nationalist theme. There were [others] in the Directorate of State Security, who were also supporters of Arab nationalism. One was in charge of the police...The plotting was going on at all levels...It was everywhere... All the intelligence services began to cooperate...

They decided, “We will [engineer a situation] so that Maaouya and the blacks will come to a brawl!” ...And they staged a military parade on November 28 (1986), a parade...in which only Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians, in other words, all and only blacks, took part. There was not one uniformed service member of clear complexion [of Berber, Arab or mixed-Berber-Arab descent]. They photographed the military parade and gave a report [to the President] saying that “62% of the military command was under the control of Afro-Mauritanians (Peulh

and Soninké)”, and that more than 70% of the army consisted of these ethnic groups. They implied that “this was extremely dangerous, because the black Africans were up to something, etc, etc”...

So ... President Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Ould Taya...becoming somewhat alarmed, immediately put an army chief, his right-hand man and an intimate friend, Djibril Ould Abdallahi to investigate the situation and find a solution to the problem...

Djibril and his team made their proposal, which was to trim the number of blacks [in the army]. They “denounced” a number of people. They proposed 1,050 soldiers - 1,000 were blacks and 50 were Maures. This was amazing! These individuals were to be summarily dismissed from the army!

At the same time, others [Maures] were stirring up the [Afro-Mauritanians]. They were warning them, saying, “Ah, Maaouya, he...will remove you all. He will remove all the blacks! He will show the door to all [the Afro-Mauritanians]!”

It was then that the [blacks] began to feel threatened...And naively, they began preparing a coup against Maaouya! [A small group of] Afro-Mauritanian [mainly Peulh officers] began plotting in 1987...

When the Afro-Mauritanian plot to overthrow President Ould Taya was uncovered before execution, the Baathists convinced Ould Taya that the perpetrators should be sentenced to death in order to “deter any other such events from recurring from ‘that’ quarter” [While in reality] it was because when you kill your opponent, there is no chance of reconciliation...

The “Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian” which had been published in April 1986 by the Peulh-dominated activist group FLAM (African Liberation Forces of Mauritania)¹¹⁷ did not help the situation by endorsing a coup d’état against President Taya and from that

¹¹⁷ The Peulh-led (black) ethnic movement “African Liberation Forces of Mauritania” (FLAM) was founded in 1983 as ethnic tensions increased under the Bidân-controlled government of Colonel Haidallah (Sow 2003, 110). The movement initially began as a result of unpopular land reforms that disadvantaged sedentary blacks within the Senegal River valley. In 1986 FLAM published the manifesto which detailed institutionalised discrimination and called for the overthrow of Bidân social and political domination. Tension between Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians escalated And resulted in the ethnic upheaval which broke out in early 1989

moment, Maaouya "went to war". He had developed a phobia... It was a real fear of blacks... It was a mortal fear of blacks! Some 50 Afro-Mauritanians (mostly Peulh) officers were arrested and tortured. Three were hung and the rest were given very long prison sentences or large fines.

Thus began the vicious cycle of action, counter-action and spiralling ethnic tension that led to the bloody events of 1989.¹¹⁸

Ly Ciré, a Peulh whose Afro-Mauritanian relatives, some army and police officers and their families, suffered in the ethnic violence, again clearly exposes the ethnic violence of 1989-1991:

They' cleaned up 'their' army... That is to say; [the Bidân] removed all Afro-Mauritanian officers, all black officers. They killed many.... There were some who were killed, others were deported, others died in prison and others simply disappeared, presumed dead... It was a purge of the army. I have many friends who are currently in Paris, Belgium, the United States or Canada.... They were all senior officers. There are plenty, [because] the more senior officers, you could not kill them all... It would be an extremely grave matter – to kill captains, lieutenants... They used Haratin [henchmen] against us... After the events of 1986, they were conscripted into the police and did all the "dirty jobs": the killings, the evictions [during 1989-1991]... All this was done by them [the Haratin]... The Bidân could not have done it. They are physically incapable.... The Haratin ex-slaves were many and are physically very strong....¹¹⁹

Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte adds authority to Ciré's accusations and confirms the involvement of the Bidân as instigators and the Haratin as the executors of the persecution suffered by the Afro-Mauritanian section of the population between 1989 and 1991:

Who is it that killed the Afro-Mauritanians? It was the Haratin, because they were incited to do so by the Bidân. They were duped! Moreover, they are unrefined people who have the ability to do "rough" acts... Can

¹¹⁸ Interview 48A with Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

¹¹⁹ Interview 07C and 07E with Peulh bank employee Ly Ciré, 8 April 2011

you imagine white Maures of religious origin doing these acts? Can you imagine even one of them with a machete cutting up a black African? This sort of work required people who are rough, who are acquainted with physical action.¹²⁰

Professor Bonte's account of the 1989-1991 pogroms draws on somewhat stereotypical notions of the Bidân and Haratin to explain violent action. The scheming Bidân are portrayed as manipulators of the rough and ready Haratin. Nevertheless, it is clear from what Professor Bonte says and from other sources that Bidân were in charge of the killings and persecution that were committed; they gave the orders.

The Bidân who had plotted against Ould Taya and against the Blacks were the same persons who had influenced the passing and implementation of land reforms initiated by the former President Haidallah. These reforms had precipitated the appropriation of fertile land along the Senegal River traditionally held and tilled by Afro-Mauritanian families. Gaye Silly Soumaré, originating from the north bank of the Senegal River, well remembers the government-backed violence against the Afro-Mauritanians, mainly targeted at the Peulh, but sometimes felt by the Seré, Sarakolé and Soninké of the Gorgol and Guidimakla regions:

In 1989, the Mauritanian government expelled many Afro-Mauritanians [from the river valley]. They were forced to cross the river to go to the Senegalese side for protection [among their relations].... The Bidân took these blacks' traditional land.... That is to say, the Afro-Mauritanians' land becoming "vacant" on their departure, so to say, and the Bidân elites came to occupy and develop it as newly released farmland.¹²¹

Confrontation in Mauritania between Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians has deep roots (Boukhars 2012, 7) and the Arabisation of education that had brought confrontations in 1966, also brought tension in the 1980s when the land

¹²⁰ Interview 34A with Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte, 5 December 2011

¹²¹ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

reforms to deal with the problem of desertification were adopted by the Government (op. cit., 8). Ordinance 83.127, enacted 5 June 1983 had begun the process for all land not clearly the property of a documented owner. It abolished the system of land tenure traditionally practised by the Afro-Mauritanians of the river valley. Moreover, the ordinance forbade any collective lawsuit regarding property rights, rendering impossible any legal action on the grounds of traditional rights of tenure by a collective tribe, village, clan or family. By the late 1980s, much of the fertile land formally held under these traditional arrangements was reassigned to Bidân developers, who now formally and privately owned large tracts in the river valley, and were favoured by the World Bank that was targeting financing of agricultural development schemes (Boukhars 2012, 8).

One of the root causes for the expropriation of traditional land, however, goes much deeper than the relationship of Mauritania with the international financial institutions. A major reason for the Afro-Mauritanians' expulsions and expropriations, that occurred in earnest between 1986 until 1990, was purely economic. The traditionally nomadic Maures had lost their main source of revenue with the terrible drought of the 1970s. The drought devastated the Maures' livestock, the only real possessions of the Bidân to that time. Camel, goat and cattle herds disappeared and the mass migration for survival to centres of food distribution began a very rapid process of urbanisation. Moreover, the Mauritanian part of the Senegalese river valley is the most fertile part of the country, and the creation of the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) on 11 March 1972, enhanced its potential, with the construction of several dams greatly increasing the available area of irrigable land within the valley. Marginal lands were gradually becoming viable as the climatic environment became less erratic, and the OMVS achievements began to be felt. These lands also began to be acquired legally or merely squatted on by large destitute and desperate groups of Hartani who were landless and released by their desperate masters as they fled for survival away from the desert and towards the sanctuary of cities and town.

Although ethnic tensions were mounting in the urban centres of Mauritania, a brutal, bloody ethnic pogrom began as a simple argument in a field between Hartani camel herders and black Senegalese farmers on 9 April 1989. The dispute was over the right to graze the herd on a plot of untilled farmland near the small village of Diawara, on the southern Senegalese side of the Senegal River. Mauritanian guards became embroiled in the argument and killed two of the Senegalese farmers.

Riots in Senegal immediately followed news of the shootings. In Dakar, the looting, raping and killing that ensued was directed principally against the Haratin, the visible individuals who worked for the Bidân shop owners who dominated the local retail business. However, the Dakar riots played into the hands of the Bidân plotters in Nouakchott. The memory runs deep in Mauritania with Afro-Mauritanians, Haratin as well as Bidân who were ill at ease discussing the subject. An anonymous member of the Bidân elite, well placed to remember the events of 1989-1991, made these comments:

It is the black Maures who were killed the most in Senegal... Very many! This is because they were the most visible in the places where the Maures lived, in these neighbourhoods [of Dakar]... They [the Senegalese] first killed many black Maures, and they mutilated their wives. When [the UN-aided urgency repatriation of Mauritians came], when the planes arrived with people who were gravely burnt and mutilated, and many Haratin women whose breasts had been cut off and were still flowing with blood... The event was mediatised [by the white Maures in the newspapers and on TV]...

It attracted the “great” rage of the black Maures [Haratin]... The Haratin [became] very violent against the black Afro-Mauritanians. They [especially] badly treated the Peulh, [the dominant ethnic group in Senegal]...

It [became] pillaging and lynching. These were people who [were enraged but] also people who just wanted to take the property of others. This is [because, as Haratin] they had nothing themselves and their envy

had been stirred....People [Haratin] took taxis [from Peulh drivers], they commandeered cars [from Peulh families], they saw you [and if you were a Peulh], they attacked, tortured and robbed you and if [the participant makes a throat cutting motion]. It was irresponsible looting.... They were bandits....

However, it must also be said that there were extremists. Many [Bidân] army officers acted irresponsibly.... They were racist. It was said that they were very pro-Arab [Baathists].... The [social] context was favourable to have a social explosion....

Moreover, the man you interviewed today, [ex-president Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall] has a great deal of responsibility... because [in 1989], he was the director of national security and intelligence.... He knows what he did.... He has administrative and moral responsibility for what happened.¹²²

The event brought to a head the deep tension that existed between Bidân and Peulh, over power and the scant resources of the state (Boukhars 2012, 8). A portion of the Bidân government officials did their part and brought fear of the black “foreigner” to the boil. Adding to already existing tensions, a popular campaign of terror, condoned by the authorities, was declared against Afro-Mauritanians in the country. It was especially targeted at the Peulh, who were denounced as “Senegalese” or “Senegalese sympathisers” regardless of their actual nationality or sympathies.

In an impromptu interview with a young Hartani night watchman, Abdou Salam Ould Tabane, he explains the events of 1989 through his experience as an aggrieved young man manipulated by Bidân agitators. His eloquent narration (for a presumed uneducated night watchman) attempts to remove Haratin responsibility for the suffering and deaths that occurred, placing it squarely with the Bidân ‘masters’. Tabane strongly implies that the Haratin were ‘misled’ by Bidân and should be held unaccountable for their actions, drawing on racial stereotypes to explain behaviour:

¹²² Interview 42A with anonymous Bidân elite, 24 November 2011

In retaliation, the black Maures attacked by ignorance....By total ignorance! White Maures fed us information and led us to believe that Senegalese had attacked Mauritaniens... There you are.... The black Maures raised themselves [without knowing the full story]... We were “used” by the Bidân... They used us to ‘beat’ [loot, burn, rape and kill] the black Africans, the Afro-Mauritaniens.... The Bidân divided us [the Blacks Africans] to conquer us...Because when, for example, you take a Hartani like me, an illiterate who does not understand, you let him know that Senegalese have killed Maures, we react, we must [retaliate and] do the same.... This is how it happens here. In general, the white Maures are weak, not financially, but weak “physically”...And so they encouraged and cheered us on, the Haratin, against “the Senegalese”, the foreigner, and there you are! This is what happened in 1989 to 1991....

The Peulh were caught between the true Senegal foreigners and the henchmen [the Haratin]! They were true citizens of Mauritania, but they were blacks... They “suffered” because the Peulh...You know, they were strong in the army and wanted to make a coup d’état in 1987... So this was an opportunity for the Maure elites who did not like the Afro-Mauritaniens, to make them pay...To teach them a lesson! Yes, indeed, it was a good lesson!

There were genocides in Kaédi [a city inhabited by many Peulh]. There were deaths in Nouakchott.... There were dead bodies everywhere...There were dead bodies everywhere! [Emotional outburst]

It is a shame when you do not understand...incomprehension. The others, they did not understand. The Haratin [we] did not have a deep understanding, of what was happening and how we were being [manipulated]...You know, there are so few intellectuals among us.

It is also that there exists a link between white Maure, the Bidân and his traditional slave, the Hartani... They prefer to act together because they are, or at least have come to believe that they are, both Arabs.

Yes, indeed, you know, the black Maure has a “weakness” for the white Maure...he is dependent on him”...If you lend me your eyes, I will see where you want me to see!” ...It is like that...I have to look where my

master wants me to look! The black Maure, the slave...he is obligated...he has adopted his white Maure master's culture and thus feels the world around him as his master wants him to feel the world around him.

[For the Bidân] "Necessity compels", and even in the modern urban setting, they have kept closer ties with the Haratin than with the Afro-Mauritanians. This is because the Hartani protects the Bidân master. When there is danger, for example, the Hartani will listen to his white master.... Taking the example of a guard, as I am now, the guard can be told not to let anyone enter on pain of being beaten. The guard will savagely beat another black should he enter, Peulh, Wolof or anyone, because he listens to his master! He will listen to his former Bidân master because he very well knows that this white Maure has been the master of his father, and of his grandfather before that.

When will it end? When will the Hartani, the black man wake up?

Maybe his son or his grandson will have gained the intelligence to understand that this is not ...the way things should be!¹²³

As conflict with Senegal continued into 1990, the Mauritanian government engaged in and actively encouraged acts of violence and seizures of property directed against Blacks.

Villages [on the North bank of the Senegal River] were razed and communities expelled en masse across the river into Senegal...some 300,000 Mauritanians fled Senegal, while some 90,000 Senegalese were expelled from Mauritania and fled to Senegal and Mali.¹²⁴

Another impromptu discussion with a Peulh taxi driver on 21 April 2011, brought on an emotional response, generated by memories of 1989, in his case, those of a very young teenager watching the carnage around him:

¹²³ Interview 44A with Abdou Salam Ould Tabane, 24 November 2011. Tabane's educational level would indicate that he may have been brought up in an elite Bidân household in his youth

¹²⁴ Foster 2011, page 35

Oh no, no, no! I can still remember all that so clearly! I have images that I see of certain events during 1989! [Clearly emotionally disturbed]... There, once...it was just there, at Medina 3, the district where the house... [Almost in tears]...I swear... This is... This day...Even I cry. They beat people there, in front of me...me. That is...Oh! I was restrained and it happened in front of me...No... It is too painful to think about it, I swear... There are people... There are some who lost their friends...myself, there were friends...I had friends before...Not even Senegalese, [but] Mauritians! I do not know where they are, I do not know where they are... Yes I swear...I swear... There are [many] people who [were killed]...! [By then, the taxi driver was openly crying and the impromptu interview ended].¹²⁵

The argument over grazing land was used by Bidân elites as a pretext to crush and expel the black Mauritanian community in a violent act of persecution officially sanctioned by the government. It had become a deadly and internationalised ethnic clash, culminating in an airlift arranged with international help, and agreed to by both Senegal and Mauritania, coming under international pressure to prevent further violence (Foster 2011, 35 and Samuel 2012, 10).

Under the pretence of returning Senegalese to their own country, the Mauritanian Government expelled tens of thousands of Afro-Mauritians, including intellectuals, civil servants, professionals, businessmen and militant trade unionists, those suspected of opposition, and farmers and cattle-herders from the fertile valley on the north bank of the Senegal River.

In villages of the south where long-standing relationships and ties existed with families just across the river, an imagined colonial-era frontier, Blacks were indiscriminately expelled by Mauritanian security forces. Their identity cards and valuable belongings were confiscated, and they were forced south across

¹²⁵ Impromptu recorded interview with unnamed Peulh taxi driver, 21 April 2011. The taxi driver was unschooled and would not even look at the ethics documents the researcher presented to him, in shame of being found to be illiterate

the Senegalese River. Those who resisted or who tried to flee were arrested, imprisoned and sometimes executed.

In the larger towns and cities, black civil servants, employees of private institutions, trade unionists, former political prisoners and their families, as well as any visibly well-to-do Africans were targeted. The persecution was sanctioned and officially aided by the police and the army. According to one study¹²⁶, some 21,500 Mauritanian Peulh were wrongly expelled from the country along with the numerous Blacks of Senegalese nationality. This is a significant portion of a particular ethnic group in a country with a population of less than two million at the time. It is acknowledged by Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians alike that the torture and killing of 503 Afro-Mauritanian soldiers at the infamous Inal detention centre did occur (Sy, 2000). It is moreover, estimated by many of the reputable Mauritanian in-country sources used in the present research that possibly up to 5,000 Afro-Mauritanians were arrested, tortured and murdered by security forces and by authority-sanctioned Haratin vigilante groups, between 1989 and 1991.

Democracy - Mauritanian-style

The tumultuous period of 1989 to 1991 was marked by President Taya turning to Baghdad, with Iraq becoming an ally and providing military advisors and materials. By now, Mauritania was clearly becoming a dictatorial regime with an uncommunicative and uncompromising leader, increasingly repressive towards the non-Bidân sections of the population, that is, the Haratin as well as the Afro-Mauritanians. A member of the Bidân elite who preferred to remain anonymous had strong connections in the political hierarchy of Nouakchott, and understood the political terrain:

Taya's regime became very pan-Arabic at that time. Saddam's victory over Iran fuelled the rapprochement...He gave us tanks and other

¹²⁶ "Le repli Peul en Mauritanie à l'Ouest de l'Assaba" edited by Christian Santoir for a French research company (ORSTOM, 1991)

military material direct from his army.... The context of the country was very favourable for... [Arm gestures to indicate ‘a civil war’].¹²⁷

With the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the new hegemonic position of the USA, the relationship of African political leaders with former colonial masters and post-colonial friends changed. For many African nations, the need for a continuation of foreign aid meant bending to the requirements of Bretton Woods’ institutions and the emerging neo-liberal approach to global development headed by the USA and its allies. Foreign assistance became tied to improvements in governance and a shift towards more democratic forms of government. Ex-colonies were urged to clean up their act, as “traditionally” acquired foreign aid would not be so forthcoming to regimes that did not move towards a democratic model. French Président Mitterrand explained that : “Le mot clef est ‘démocratie’ et l’aide française en tiendra compte ”¹²⁸.

Democracy, free and fair elections and “the multiparty system” were words that were being heard by the African participants, but these were not interpreted in the same way by all at the Franco-African summit at La Baule on 20 June 1990¹²⁹. Each African leader recognised change was required but reacted in a way particular to their circumstances, consistent with the domestic needs of their particular environment. For example, at the time President Moussa Traoré of Mali publicly rejected the call for multipartism. He was deposed less than a year later in March 1991, allegedly with the involvement, or at least with the assistance, of France and the withdrawal of economic and military assistance. This withdrawal brought about general economic hardship and an increase in the general population’s grievances. It also brought about a weakening of Traoré’s hold on the armed forces and his eventual overthrow by the army, which brought in civilian rule and multipartism within a year, as demanded by France, their ex-colonial master (Meredith 2005, 410).

¹²⁷ Interview 42A with anonymous Bidân elite, 24 November 2011

¹²⁸ “The important word is ‘democracy’, and French aid will take its development into account”.

Taken from the speech by President Mitterrand at the La Baule, 20 June, 1990

¹²⁹ See the Glossary for a deeper explanation of Mitterrand’s speech

President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, in his own pragmatic way and within the confines of his particular environment, took steps to bring in at least a semblance of democratic procedures. This meant adaptation to the Maure's tribalism that permeated the society and the way the country was run – formally and informally. As a result, Mauritanian democracy took on a different appearance.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the major western powers and the global governance agencies such as the IMF and World Bank added better governance as a condition of continuing aid support to many Sub-Saharan African countries, including Mauritania. Good governance is an umbrella term covering a number of changes in the governing institutions of a society, including more transparency, improved provision of services, better financial management, more effective legal systems and improved political and economic access for the wider population. At this time, Mauritania ranked low on these indicators but there were growing but guarded expectations among the population of a shift to a more open and democratic regime. For example, M'Boye Ould Arafa, at the time an energetic and successful technocrat who wanted to see progressive changes in his country, remarked:

It was 1991, and after La Baule¹³⁰, “everyone in Mauritania wanted democracy”. Therefore, this system was “taken up”.... [President Taya] opened to the multiparty system.... However, in any multiparty system you have to have a support base, [in the Mauritanian environment] the easiest means for you to have a support base and be a successful political candidate was to retreat to the “umbrella” of your tribe This is where there was a resurgence of the importance of the [Bidân] tribe. Because, although in the past there had been moves to abolish the tribal system and the tribe had become less important, it had nevertheless continued to exist....

¹³⁰ The La Baule speech of 20 June 1990 by French President François Mitterrand was given within the context of the 16th Conference of African and French Heads of States at La Baule-Escoublac, Loire-Atlantique. Mitterrand tied French development aid to the democratic efforts that the former French colonies had to show. These included a representative system of government, free elections, multipartism, freedom of the press, an independent judiciary and the abolition of censorship.

From 1992, however, this traditional system began to take on a renewed significance and influence the politics of the country.... The problem also, is when it comes to talking about democracy “on the ground”... When you have people who are not educated, who do not have employment or the prospect of employment, how can there be a democracy?

Let us say I lived next to your tent, next to your encampment, but I do not have anything to eat. You give me food to feed my children and myself. If I am ill, you lend me your camel to go to the doctor in town... How can someone come and tell me that I should not vote for you? Can they tell me that I should not vote for you because of this or because of that? Is that democracy? ¹³¹

Ex-minister Soumaré also gave his impression of the democratisation of Mauritania:

In 1991, there was a movement for democracy in all African countries, which followed the conference of African heads of state and the speech by the French President, Mitterrand. He made a statement to the effect that France’s foreign aid in favour of African countries would now take consideration of their degree of democratisation...

However, how do we vote here? This is not democracy, as the West knows it, where the state and the individual have a direct link, with no institution in between.... Here the individual finds comfort and protection from the family, the tribe and the super-tribe... Therefore, there are these [sub-national] institutions between the state and the individual....

Here, a chief could say, “We should vote for this candidate”. Everyone in the tribe must and would vote for him. Yes, that is to say, Mauritania had experienced election even before independence... In addition, at that time, the tribe had a [very] strong influence...over the individual. The chief would say that we will vote this way, and we voted this way. However, the tribes may be are beginning to lose their influence? They are maybe becoming less important. ¹³²

¹³¹ Interview 28F with ex-director of Mines department M’Boye Ould Arafa, 23 November 2011

¹³² Interview 11A with the Late ex-senator Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

Ly Ciré highlights the corrupt practices that continued to operate beneath the official show of compliance, for the benefit of western aid donors:

In 1991, there was a sudden wave of democratisation in Africa, but the Mauritanian soldiers returned to the dance with Colonel Maaouya... Maaouya allowed them to move fully into the state apparatus at all levels, in one way or another...

Officials falsified the polls [in the 1992 Presidential elections]. They stuffed the ballot boxes, and this is the only reason why Maaouya was re-elected uncontested as President¹³³...

In addition, another fraud was realised at the time, people denounced Maaouya for having many “naturalised” Tuaregs from the East into the country...It was the same for many other [illegal] voters [from Senegal and Mali].¹³⁴

We even had a village that became famous... You say “Kobenni” and everybody knows what you mean...It is located when you go towards Taoudeni [in Mali]...This village became famous for the [falsified] elections [results] from there... There were many more voters’ results than there were officially recorded inhabitants that voted from the village... it seems there were not even 500 people [in the village], and some 2500 voting papers were returned [and 98% had voted for President Taya]...So you see now, when you talk about “Kobenni”, everyone knows what we’re talking about! “The effect Kobenni...!” It was on TV!

[Taya] received 98% [of the votes]...! Well, maybe that was so, or it was not...But we now had the trappings of “democracy”.¹³⁵

¹³³ Their wider motive was to ensure the continuity of the Bidân hegemony over Afro-Mauritanians, but their immediate objective in doing this was to maintain President Taya, his tribe and wider business, tribal connections and political entourage – themselves – in the seat of power and first in line in the distribution of rents and privileges

¹³⁴ Illegal voter enrolment and ballot box stuffing could suggest that the President or at least the key political actors behind him were worried that votes might not go their way in free and fair elections. Nevertheless, in Mauritania at the time, it may have been crudely done, thus bringing close to 100% of votes for the incumbent (and higher in some regions), in order to ensure a win

¹³⁵ Interview 07E and 07F with BCI Bank employee Ly Ciré, 23 November 2011

The massive fraud and corruption perpetrated by the Taya government is an accepted fact in Mauritania, so much so that government statistics presented to the World Bank and IMF are referred to as “economic fiction” (Samuel 2011, 9). Even a Hartani hotel employee – albeit a well-connected young man given his level of education and his position in the hotel – spoke openly about such practices:

There was a total lack of governance. When money flowed, some profited enormously at the expense of the others... People in power were the fraudsters... That is, the team made up the government’s administration itself! That is, the administration of President Ould Taya! In a broad way, this means the Smacides tribal relatives... They benefited greatly during the reign of Maaouya...

It is also true that Smacides were preferentially selected for positions of power¹³⁶, and be around the President, the Prime Minister, etc... But after and below that: ministers, managers, project managers, and all that, the positions were also filled by Smacides, Oualad Bousbaa [and other allied tribes]... They were all white Maures... The Smacides and their associates profited enormously during the reign of Ould Taya.¹³⁷

After the ethnic unrest of 1989-1990, Mauritania continued through the 1990s with only the appearance of a progressive democratic country. The important Franco-African forum at La Baule in July 1990 heralded multipartism, freedom of the press, “free” elections and other trappings the West saw as important signs of modernity and wanted to see emerge in Africa. However, France, the purportedly well-meaning ex-colonial power at the forum, gave little thought to how these changes would come about. It did not seriously consider the suitability of these institutions to the African context or offer to assist in the evidently difficult transition to democracy. Mitterrand’s memorable speech certainly made it clear that without visible democratic change, foreign aid would not materialise.

¹³⁶ There are some sixty Bidân tribes in Mauritania and these further congregate as loose super-tribes. Their unions are fluid and political and economic control was with the Smacides of Atar at the time, backed by the Idawali of central Mauritania and Oualad Bousbaa of Akjoujt and Inchiri

¹³⁷ interview 22A with Hotel employee Isselmou Mohamed Lemine, 16 April 2011

Maaouya seemed willing to accept the democratic changes demanded by President Mitterrand in exchange for continued foreign aid. However, and notwithstanding the 12 December 1984 stated objective of ridding the country of undemocratic practices, the Mauritanian state continued to operate according to formal and informal practices such as despotism, nepotism, tribalism, corruption and embezzlement. There also remained endemic poverty, a problem related to the deep, pre-colonial ethnic and socio-cultural fault-lines, as well as intra-tribal competition among the Bidân for the spoils of power, and rents from fishing activities and iron ore mining. These widespread undemocratic practices of government actors and Bidân institutions, active agents in corruption, paralysed the state and prevented a fair and economically improved outcome for the general population. An anonymous informant with relatives in the military at the time stated:

In 1992, Maaouya wanted Mauritania to be shown to have “free and fair” elections, but [my relative] was a general in the army... and he opposed it...

He pointed out that this position was to ensure that the army elites of his tribal group remained in a position of authority and believed Taya could lose to Ahmed Ould Daddah, the ex-President’s brother:

A coup d’état was attempted, led by my relative and some of Taya’s cousins. It failed, [but] Taya understood [the implications] and he ensured that he would win the elections.¹³⁸

In saying that Taya would ensure he won the elections, he implied that he would use every available means necessary, including electoral fraud.

Taya’s autocratic reign became harder and widespread fraudulent behaviour at all levels of the society accompanied by unrelenting institutionalised inter-racial discrimination became customary. By 2003, it is estimated that the

¹³⁸ Interview 42A with anonymous high-ranking Bidân, 24 November 2011

falsification of the macroeconomic accounts had reached a sum twice as large as that shown in the official statistics, the “economic fiction” constructed at the insistence of the World Bank and the IMF in order to give formal procedural substance to their statistics and generate ‘appropriate’ financial and economic policies (Samuel 2011, 9). These data and statistics masked the illegal use of public funds, the provision of public funds to private individuals, fraudulent access to the currency reserves, extra-budgetary expenditure and privileged access to the exchange market for some ‘connected’ individuals. These were the principal methods used in syphoning public funds into the pockets of the chosen few (op. cit., 9-14). Samuel notes:

Many administrative relationships were contingent on the small details of everyday office life... and tribal relationships... credit facilities at the Central Bank were opened illegally, and all those who were in a position to do so ‘helped themselves from the till’. ¹³⁹

In many of the interviews, with people of varying occupational and political backgrounds, as well as with varying links to government, the pillaging of state funds by the president’s tribal entourage and political retinue was regularly mentioned. By the time of Taya’s Government, Gaye Silly Soumaré had served Mauritania as an Ambassador in several positions in North Africa and Europe. In spite of the honours bestowed on him by the Bidân government, he openly expressed his disgust at the behaviour of the “younger” leaders, and at the institutional environment imposed by the Bidân tribal system:

Taya, he “worked” solely for his family and those around him. The wealthiest businessmen in Mauritania are from his tribe, the Smacides. [They are] from his closest family... Ould Nouegued is his uncle... Abdallah Ould Abdallahi is also from his tribe and in fact from his closest family.... With Taya there was a lot of [government] favours granted to members of his tribe.... It is not that the tribe influences the individual.... It is the individual which influences the tribe, who uses the tribe and his associates as his powerbase in order to consolidate his

¹³⁹ Samuel 2011, pages 10 - 11

power. He places his tribesmen and associates around himself in order to use their support.¹⁴⁰

There was a series of attempted coups against the president, until his successful overthrow in 2005. Ely Ould Sneiba, an educated member of the Bidân elite, independent member of the opposition, and political agitator from a warrior tribe originating from the east, spared no words in condemning the Taya regime:

Taya lasted 21 years in power....It was his relatives that profited from the system he put in place. They profited on the back of and impoverishment of the general population. They “raided” the coffers of the country... It is a fact that the repercussions are very grave if a country loses two decades of development! Taya created a system based on the embezzlement of public funds and the enrichment of his tribesmen and close collaborators.¹⁴¹

The President was also a Colonel, and the army used the situation to its own advantage. Ly Ciré’s word below echo the embezzlement and fraud highlighted by Samuel (2011):

[Favoured] Maure colonels dealt directly with them [business people]. This is what they did. They remained in the army and had many favours being in the army... Let us take an example. I am a colonel, I am from a certain influential tribe [affiliated to the President]... I create a road building company, I create an insurance company, I create all sorts of enterprises and demand [through my tribal relatives in the government] to be given access [and contracts] to the markets in which the companies that I have created can operate....

This is how it was done. They [the Bidân army officers] became rent-seekers. This is how it happened. When the government would have a tender for a project, this tender would be put out [to the general public] but everyone knew in advance, who would win the bidding round. A lot of money was to be had, and that is how it was done....

¹⁴⁰ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

¹⁴¹ Interview 13A with Bidân political activist Ely Ould Sneiba, 10 April 2011

Moreover, never would an Afro-Mauritanian win such a market in a fair manner. All these projects and lucrative deals were allocated to the Bidân elites within the army and specifically those that were favoured [within Taya's entourage].¹⁴²

President Ould Taya did attempt to open up his country to the outside world for resource and other developments, and some continue to admire him, especially his tribal relatives. A high-ranked government official from the Smacide elite, who preferred to remain anonymous, excuses Taya for the excesses perpetrated during his term as president:

It was President Taya who “opened the door” for you [and allowed you and your foreign colleagues to begin petroleum exploration].

He really wanted to develop his country... Nevertheless, it is hypocrisy that reigns in our country, especially among politicians... The people around Taya profited a lot... They exploited him, do you understand? Once they were done, they got rid of him. They abandoned him... Nevertheless, the world forcibly becomes more modern [around us], to the detriment of these [greedy, sycophantic Smacide elites (from the gestures rather than words)]....

Today, people are in awe of Abdel Aziz because he has cleared the dust from the old tarmac, which the French laid down during independence. He patched a few holes in the road and made sure he was seen supervising the work in the streets. However, this show of concern for development and the betterment of people's lives, palls in comparison to what Ould Taya achieved in the development of telephone and mobile communication, tourism, and the petroleum industry....

He wanted to be a “true son of Mauritania”, but to me, he was too gullible, he was too naïve. He had surrounded himself with certain people who gave him the information that they wished for him to hear, and he never made the effort to verify its credibility.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Interview 7E with Ly Ciré, 8 April 2011

¹⁴³ Interview 16A with anonymous Smacide, 11 April 2011

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the roots of Mauritania's political instability are of long-standing and exacerbated by the creation of the modern state after 1960.

The principal drivers of this instability were both internal and external to the country. Internally, they included the country's low level of development at independence, its lack of an established and efficient set of national institutions capable of providing nationally acceptable economic, social and political outcomes, the persistence of pre-independence sub-national loyalties as well as that of institutions that favoured specific ethnic communities over others. The principal external drivers for instability were its continuing dependence on France, its ex-colonial master, dependence on the wider foreign aid community for financial and wider political support, as well as continuing political misunderstandings with its near neighbours. The imposition of a Westphalian state-system by France, the colonial power, on a society lacking the institutional history and experience required to sustain such a structure, created further instability. Tensions arose as historical links and institutions adjusted to the imposed socio-political landscape. The colonial power had manipulated pre-colonial sub-national loyalties during the brief period of active colonial rule in order to consolidate French power in the region¹⁴⁴. As power and resources became concentrated in the hands of the Bidân after independence, the persistence of precolonial, subnational loyalties at the level of the tribe and ethnic community, for Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians intensified the economic and political gap between them.

The unfavourable economic and political conditions of the country were further exacerbated in the 1970s during a period of rapidly deteriorating climatic conditions and the migration of a large proportion of the previously nomadic Maures into the major urban centres. Disputes with its neighbours

¹⁴⁴ The term "active" colonial rule is used to differentiate the post-colonial control that France exercises to present in Africa, through overt and covert actions and relationships popularly termed "La Francafrrique"

over delimitation of its borders and the very legitimacy of its existence as the state of Mauritania, caused regional and international tensions, which culminated in the overthrow of the first President. The establishment of an enduring military dictatorship in 1978 by the Bidân, a demographic minority of the population, and the control of wealth and resources by dominant Bidân tribal factions, resulted in abuse of power, inequalities in distribution of resources and ethnic discrimination and oppression. The struggle for political control of the state by rival tribal groups and the army, institutions unadjusted to the socio-political realities of the Bidân tribal system with its fluidity in allegiances, resulted in systematic and institutionalised embezzlement and corruption, and general poor governance to the highest level of authority. As various tribal groups took control of the state, whether maraboutic Bidân from the southwest, or warriors from the east or the north, each gorged themselves with the spoils of public wealth.

A growing fault-line in the post-independence politics of the country was that between the Bidân, the Haratin and the Afro-Mauritanian population, which culminated in the ethnic pogroms of the late 1980s. Underlying these tensions was a history of slavery, slave raiding, shifting tribal and ethnic allegiances and diverse political systems that were brought together within the confines of an arbitrary set of boundaries imposed by outsiders. Today, these tensions still exist as potentially explosive fault-lines underlying Mauritania's socio-political landscape, despite the appearance of harmony and democratic goodwill that the Bidân elites present to the outside world (Spiegel 2013, 70-73).

This brief historical account of the emergence and development of Mauritania has sought to demonstrate that political instability pre-dates the oil discoveries of later years. It was in this unstable political environment that oil was discovered at Chinguetti in 2001.

This chapter has identified the key problems of tribalism and ethnic instabilities in past and present Mauritania, instabilities that predate the

discovery of any oil resource. These realities have been part of the Mauritanian socio-political landscape since the first Bedouin tent made its appearance in the Sahara region.

The next chapter examines the emergence of the petroleum industry and its engagement with the Mauritanian state.

Chapter 4 – The petroleum industry in the modern era

The previous chapter provided an account of the political history of Mauritania up to 2000. Its main purpose was to support the argument that political instability pre-dates the search and development of the petroleum industry in the country.

In this chapter, the focus shifts to the period from 2001 to 2011 during which time oil was discovered and developed. It focuses on the 2001-2007 period during which Woodside Petroleum developed and established the petroleum industry in the country with production at the Chinguetti Oilfield beginning on 26 February 2006. Its main purpose is to locate the emergence of the oil industry within the socio-political context of the time. It takes into account the main political developments of the period, state, leader and elite politics and behaviour, the interaction of the state with the oil industry players and the relationship of Mauritania to wider regional and international forces that impinged upon its development.

Although there is much academic and other writing that deals with the “Oil Curse”, Mauritanian-specific information on the socio-political impact of oil discovery is extremely limited. The analysis is thus principally based on interviews conducted in 2011 and 2012 with several of the key political figures and commentators of the time as well as ordinary people affected by the establishment of this new industry, academic sources, and articles from the online Mauritanian daily press.

Active oil exploration had been encouraged by the various governments of Mauritania. This encouragement began with the government of Ould Daddah in the late 1960s, and continued until 1989. However, exploration drilling by the largest international oil companies had found only traces of oil in eleven wells drilled offshore within the Coastal Basin and two wells drilled onshore within the Taoudeni Basin. When the ethnic problems of 1989 erupted, two planned wells by Amoco and Mobil were abandoned and by 1991, all

companies that had created even some minor revenue for Mauritania through their exploration activities, had left the country¹⁴⁵.

The departure of these companies was criticised for several years by the Mauritanian government, and it was pleased when in mid-1995, Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd began to promote Mauritania as a viable investment destination to a number of petroleum exploration companies. Encouragement had come from high-ranking members of the local elites of the Smacide and Idawali tribes, seeking new means of revenue for the state other than the iron-ore mine at Zouérat. At that time, Zouérat had been starved of investment for many years because its major Libyan and Iraqi government shareholders had been preoccupied with their own domestic problems.

Isselmou Abdelkader, a member of the Idawali tribe, served as a minister in President Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya's government, until he was removed from office. In an interview, he argued that the promotion of renewed oil exploration had only one objective, which was to enrich the governing elites and not the general population:

The ruling power had, as its primary mission, the protection of the economic interest and the continued accumulation of wealth of certain groups of people.... The state had become the "policeman" that preserved the economic interests of certain [favoured] tribes, and principally the tribe of the president himself, of Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya.¹⁴⁶

By mid-1996, Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd had succeeded in attracting the ASX-junior Hardman Resources NL¹⁴⁷ to take an interest in Mauritania, and had co-signed the first three Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) with the Mauritanian government since the early 1980s. All the terms of the contract had been negotiated and agreed to between the two Australian companies¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ex-Texaco geophysicist Gary Jeffery pers. comm. 2010

¹⁴⁶ Interview 48A with ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

¹⁴⁷ See page 19

¹⁴⁸ Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd was represented by the researcher as principal of the private company,

and representatives from the government¹⁴⁹ over several days in London between Friday 21 June and Wednesday 26 June 1996. The terms were considered fair and just by all parties, later testified by the 2005 Junta's insistence that the 2004 amendments should be reversed in the legally binding contractual arrangement between the holders of the Production Sharing Contracts (over Blocks 3, 4 and 5) and the Mauritanian government.

In the view of the government, it had granted somewhat easier terms than it might otherwise have done in order to attract investors in the resources sector after years of being shunned by the international oil companies. Both Hardman and Elixir were very small companies within the international petroleum industry, but the willingness of the Mauritanian government to deal with them testifies to the difficulty Mauritania was having in attracting investors. From their perspective, the junior oil companies had ceded a larger than usual proportion of potential returns on future production to the government, in order to encourage the Mauritians to grant them permits over some 75,000 sq km or close to half the surface area of the prospective offshore basin along the Mauritanian coastline.

Both government and companies understood that the expenditure commitments exceeded the capacity of either companies and therefore a larger partner would have to be attracted to join the project. By mid-1998, Woodside had joined the Hardman-Elixir joint venture as operator and, within the next three years, other international companies had taken up acreage in offshore and onshore Mauritania in a rush to acquire permits. By early 2006, an unprecedented total area of some 1.5 million sq km was marked for exploration across the hydrocarbon-prospective basins of offshore and onshore Mauritania and onshore Mali.

Ted Ellyard, Managing Director represented Hardman Resources NL and M'Boye Ould Arafa, as Director General of the Department of Mines and Hydrocarbon together with a technician known as Itawal from the department represented the Mauritanian government

¹⁴⁹ According to Mohamed (Ould) Lemine Dahi, member of the 2005 Junta and Chief of Cabinet of General Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall,

The Mauritanian community, as a whole, began to experience the “cascade effect” of this activity, reflected in the increase in internet use and number of mobile phones. For example, Internet usage increased from just above 0% of the Mauritanian population in 2001, to 0.25% in 2005, 1.8% in 2008 and 3.1% in 2011. More dramatic rises were seen in mobile phone usage, which increased from just above 0% in 2000, to 5% in 2001, and increased steadily to stabilise at 67% of Mauritians owning and regularly using a mobile communication device by 2009 (World Bank data, 2013a).

In current US dollars, unadjusted for inflation, Mauritania’s net Foreign Direct Investment inflow, which had seen very little activity since the early 1970s with the development of the Zouérat iron-ore mine, rose in the five-year period between 2000 and 2005 from US\$ 40.1 million to US\$ 804.1 million. In addition, nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for that same period increased from US\$ 1.3 billion to just below US\$ 4 billion (World Bank data, 2013b). While GDP remained high, as measured by the World Bank, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) dropped very rapidly back to some US\$ 300 million in 2007, and it continued to decrease to steady in 2011 to a pre-2005 level of less than US\$ 50 million.

Whatever the figures, given the “economic fiction” perpetrated by the Taya regime¹⁵⁰, the researcher’s hotel accountant, himself a well-connected Smacide, was enthusiastic about the contribution that Woodside and other oil companies made to the economy of Mauritania. Revenues from this activity cascaded into much peripheral business and to the Nouakchott community in general. For the accountant, it was highlighted in hotel occupancy largely through long-term residency and the flyin-flyout of technicians and other personnel and contractors associated with the establishment of the AUD 1 billion Chinguetti oil operations:

¹⁵⁰ According to Samuel (2011, 8 – 9) “the sharing out of rents was central to the economy of misappropriation... [and] ... the falsification of macroeconomic accounts had reached an impressive scale”

I cannot tell you exactly how much [of this bonanza] is to be directly attributed to the petroleum activities. However, I know that during the years 2001 to 2005, at this hotel at any rate, the petroleum industry generated a huge increase in revenue.¹⁵¹

By May 2001, Woodside had completed its maiden well in Mauritania, the first since the mid-1980s. This was also the discovery well for the first commercial operation in Mauritania, the Chinguetti oilfield. Several other discoveries rapidly followed, highlighting the potential of the offshore basin and sparking an investment rush into Mauritania that gave a large boost to the economy, as well as – for a time – the morale of the general population. Sidaty Ould Fall, a local hotel reception manager and a Hartani from the Smacide tribe, gave his view of the effect that the petroleum discovery had on the general population:

Let us say that the [discovery of] petroleum in Mauritania generated great pride in each of us Mauritians. A great feeling of excitement and joy [grew in us]...It also gave direct employment to some 2,000 people and was a support base for many, many families in Nouakchott. It created a cascade effect [on the local economy] felt by everyone.¹⁵²

By 2003, the petroleum industry, dominated by Western companies, began to experience the effects of operating in a society with its own particular cultural and political character and its own internal political concerns. The Woodside Mauritanian operations were directed from Perth by Agu Kantsler, a stoic, strong-willed person who may not have understood, or more likely did not see the relevance of coming to terms with the historically rooted, social complexity and specific cultural practices of Woodside's hosts:

We had, I thought, a good relationship when we started...given that the country was very keen to see investment. The Oil Minister at the time was a charming older man, who was quite good to deal with... [Ould] Rajel! We had no problems with him at all. The bureaucrats in the

¹⁵¹ Interview 25A Sidi Mohamed Ould Mohamed Lemine, 18 April 2011

¹⁵² Interview 1A with Sidaty (Ould) Fall, 4 April 2011

department that we were dealing with were also supportive, and there was the guy who was there for quite a long time, a black African with very curly hair, his name was [M'Boye Ould] Arafa.¹⁵³

He was supportive as well. Both Arafa and Wane [Arafa's successor and a Peulh or Afro-Mauritanian] were straightforward to deal with. We did not have any problems....

There were some issues when we were doing things... Working out of the harbour, the harbour master was an "interesting" man to deal with.... There were extended negotiations that took place over our use of the wharf and rental of a warehouse at the harbour for our operations....

However, by and large, each time we ran into problems like that, we just went back to the government and sort of said, "Well, you need to sort this out; we can't work in this way!" or "Do you want this to happen, or do you not want it to happen?" ... We generally got through things ok.¹⁵⁴

The commercial discovery of oil and gas in 2001 was used between 2003 and 2005 by President Taya as a means of diverting the attention of the wider population from pressing social problems and failed coup attempts. The operator of the international joint venture, Woodside Petroleum Ltd, was put under great pressure by the presidency to accelerate the development of the Chinguetti oil discovery. Oil thus became a political weapon to divert people's attention from pressing economic and social issues, and the government neglected to seek investment into other potentially productive activities that could likewise be initiated. This political use of the oil potential of Mauritania can be seen in some respects as a 'curse' as far as it contributed to a delay in developing a more diversified economy and became embroiled in the political horse-trading of the governing elite. However, its importance should not be overstated, as the study seeks to show.

¹⁵³ Arafa is a white Maure with very dark skin and crispy black hair, mistakenly taken for an Afro-Mauritanian by Agu

¹⁵⁴ Interview 51A with Agu Kantsler, 30 January 2011

Woodside's well-travelled International Exploration Manager, the instigator of Woodside's presence in the Hardman-Elixir joint venture, understood the complexities that emerged in working with Mauritians at all levels. His affable, but forthright manner was well appreciated by the Mauritians in the Ministries he dealt with, but his task was not made any easier:

The government had no understanding of the time it takes to go from discovery to first production [as well as] the amount of investment that has to be put in... We therefore had to first of all educate them on these topics. We also spent an enormous amount of time in making sure they had some sort of government processes before we set sail on doing the development of Chinguetti. The worst thing we could have done would have been to proceed with no government governance or agencies to regulate [the industry], and we could just have gone "slipshod over everything"....

We [thus] spent an awful lot of time making sure they had both an "Environmental Plan" in place, [and] a "Maritime Plan" in place. We brought them over here to Australia to see how we conduct our operations. They talked to the government here to make sure that they understood that what we were doing there was similar to what we would do in Australia... And they [informed themselves] about the regulating system here in Western Australia. We, therefore, proactively tried to make sure that [some sort of petroleum] governance was in place....

The PSC-terms that were originally negotiated with the government [by Hardman and Elixir]... were acceptable... to Woodside [at the time of entering the joint venture in 1998]... [However] once you were developing Chinguetti, you realised how problematic it would be....

So, prior to actually "fabricating steel" for Chinguetti, there were [several] issues because of vagaries in the PSC terms [which] we had to "iron out" [in 2004] prior to putting our own financial investment in place¹⁵⁵.

In addition, there was tremendous pressure from the president to begin production as soon as possible!

¹⁵⁵ This refers to the amendments discussed below

I remember a meeting with our then-MD/CEO...He had had a meeting with the president and reported that the president wanted production within two years [by end-2005]!

We had to explain to the president that that was not actually possible, but that we [would] endeavour to get it as fast as possible. We had to educate him on what we would have to do to get to that point....

Moreover, there was tremendous pressure put on us to start delivering hydrocarbons...straight away!¹⁵⁶

The coup attempt of 2003

On 8 June 2003, a faction of the army mutinied and marched tanks and heavy artillery into Nouakchott. The rebels were led by ex-Major Saleh Ould Hanenna, an officer belonging to an eastern Beni Hassan or “warrior” tribe, who had earlier been suspended from the army for allegedly plotting a coup, purportedly motivated by tribal grievances dating from precolonial times and the struggle between warriors and marabouts¹⁵⁷. He had received a public dressing down on his demotion and this had not gone down well with him and his supporters.

He was, according to “radio-trottoir”¹⁵⁸, reduced to driving a taxi in Nouakchott. Although the purported coming bonanza of petroleum revenues may have played a role in motivating the mutineers, Foster (2011, 50) argues that personal humiliation and feelings of vengeance played a much greater role. In the course of the present research, no evidence could be found that oil or its revenues were on the mind of the plotters when they organised the 2003 coup. The popular Hanenna readily mobilised the elite and well-armed troops who had served close to him to take up arms against their fellow soldiers, certainly motivated by other motives than simply revenge.

¹⁵⁶ Interview 52A with ex-Woodside International Exploration Manager, 30 January 2012

¹⁵⁷ Since the Char Bouba War of 1644-1674, animosity had festered and tainted all relations between tribes descendent from Arab Beni Hassan warriors and maraboutic Berber tribes of the southeast

¹⁵⁸ Literally “gossip heard on the streets” or commonly known fact

The fighting which lasted several days was bloody and left hundreds dead among both soldiers and civilians. Foster (2011, 51-52) points out that there was noticeable ambiguity associated with this coup within Taya's administration, and no one dared at first condemn or applaud the coup. Dr Zacharia Ould Ahmed Salem, a political science lecturer at Nouakchott University and prolific author and editor of noted publications on Mauritania, in spite of his Smacide tribal kinship, clearly points to the root cause of the attempted coup as President Taya himself:

May 2003, there is a coup d'état.... It fails... However, I do not think it occurred because of the discovery of offshore petroleum...

It may have played a role, but...I do not think it did so....No, it is due to the exhaustion of a reign that has lasted beyond its due date! That is all! He was twenty-one years in power! The longer Maaouya remained in power, the greater was the grip his entourage had over him and the greater the embezzlement¹⁵⁹. As an example, his second wife was becoming ever more rich and powerful!¹⁶⁰

The embezzlement and fraud committed by Taya's entourage was no secret, and ordinary people felt powerless under its weight:

Power! That is to say that the power in place wished by any means, to monopolise everything and govern all as it felt, something which not everyone agreed with.... It caused much dissent and hence the repeated, attempted coups that took place...between 2003 and 2005... Effectively on top of all that, poor governance and the wish to amass everything of value by the president's people created discontent... Their wish was to corner all avenues of wealth creation for [themselves] and leave the general population to suffer.¹⁶¹

The French, at least in an overt manner, stayed out of the struggle. Although Taya's rapprochement with the United States did not please them, the faction

¹⁵⁹ Dr Zacharia is emphatically putting blame on the entourage and not on president Taya, a tribal relative

¹⁶⁰ Interview 35A with Zacharia Ould Ahmed Salem, 11 December 2011

¹⁶¹ Interview 22A with Isselmou Mohamed Lemine, 16 April 2011

that led the 2003 coup belonged to the Oualad Nasr, a tribe that believed in the Arabisation of Mauritania and the need to return to Islamic roots, an ideology much feared by France.

It is reported that on 8 June 2003, President Taya took control of the situation. Foster relays a story of the president leading his troops in an assault against the mutineers (op. cit., 51). However, reliable primary research sources from Bidân elites who wish to remain anonymous dispute this view. Amadou Dia, a Peulh fearful of a renewal of ethnic blame for the attempted coup, suggests that the coup shook the president. From that time on, the president became intensely and personally fearful, inhibiting his exercise of power as head of state.

He had seen “the end” from very close...He felt that there would be another coup... He was very afraid in the end. He was even afraid of his close relatives.¹⁶²

It was widely circulated on the streets of Nouakchott at the time¹⁶³ and subsequently confirmed by many of the Bidân elites interviewed, that the attempt on his life drove Taya to retreat in fear from even his closest relatives. He closed himself off in his presidential palace, surrounded solely by his presidential guards – headed by Colonel Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz, today’s head of state.

Nevertheless, petroleum wealth was coming. The priorities for the Bidân in power, the Smacides and their allies in Oualad Bousba and Idawali tribes, were to maintain the *status quo* at all cost, and be ready for the coming financial tsunami:

Prosperity also appeared just around the corner, with estimates in 2004 that oil would begin flowing [at a rate of 75,000 barrels a day] by the

¹⁶² Interview 26A with Dia Amadou, 19 April 2011

¹⁶³ As a director of Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd, by 2005 renamed Roc Oil Mauritanian Pty Ltd, the researcher spent time in Mauritania between 2001 and 2006, during the development of Chinguetti

end of 2005 and some \$150 to \$250 million would flow into the [government's] coffers by [end] 2006. In anticipation, Nouakchott was undergoing a boom, as new hotels sprouted for foreign businessmen, SUVs proliferated and immigrants from across West Africa flocked to the city, which sprawled into the surrounding dunes.¹⁶⁴

The coup d'état of 3 August 2005

On 3 August 2005, Taya was overthrown by his closest military colleagues while travelling overseas. The coup lasted less than three hours, and no shots were fired.

Woodside personnel confirmed that representatives of the (future) Junta visited their office the day prior to the coup and warned them in a firm but friendly manner that something was about to happen and that it would be advisable for all personnel to stay indoors. These representatives strongly emphasised that they would do nothing to jeopardise petroleum operations, and they guaranteed a smooth return to normal activities without any delay. This action of the coup perpetrators indicates that they were aware of the immediate economic and political importance of this fledgling industry for the country, including their supporters and allies.

Once the coup was over, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall from the Oualad Bousbaa tribe, Head of National Security and a close collaborator of the ousted President, was selected to head the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (CMJD) and nominated as state leader or President¹⁶⁵. Mauriticians generally saw this as an opportunity to improve the country's stability (Abdelkader 2008, 140). The new military state leader¹⁶⁶ established the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and promised a

¹⁶⁴ Foster 2011, page 57

¹⁶⁵ And cousin to Colonel Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz, head of the Presidential Guard and collaborator in, if not the leader of, the coup d'état which overthrew President Taya.

¹⁶⁶ Ely Mohamed Vall maintained that he was not a President, as he argued that this title should be reserved for democratically elected national leaders

return to civilian rule in less than two years. However, he added, “he [would] then watch over the diligent management of the state”¹⁶⁷.

This first coup of the new millennium in 2005, with the promise of petroleum revenue in its wings, was followed by two more in 2008 and 2009. The motivation was not oil *per se* but the retention of the reins of power, access to sources of government rents, the retention of the privileges of position as well as ethnic hegemony in general.

Foster infers (2011, 89) that this first coup may have occurred as a result of expectations of petroleum revenues and rents, arousing the appetites of well-placed elites to acquire a controlling stake in the coming wealth from an already weakened regime. However, deeper causes were at work. While the expected oil wealth failed to materialise, what persisted were the root causes of the socio-political upheavals that occurred in 2005, 2008 and 2009. As already discussed, Mauritania has a unique tribal ethno-political history. The Maure tribes had developed their own specialised set of political and social inter-relationships in order to deal with each other’s claims for power. The coups and the socio-political disruptions of the period under study emerged from the fluid intra-Maure tribal relationships, and from the fragile relationships that had evolved over a lengthy historical period between Bidân, Haratin and various Afro-Mauritanian ethnicities.

The ousting of President Taya had taken an ironic twist. The president had recruited tribal members and allied tribesmen to serve in his presidential guard. He had dispatched them to keep control of the rebellious Oualad Nasr and related Lemreighty tribes who were Hanenna’s relations, in the far east of the country. This region is far removed from the coast where offshore petroleum reserves were being discovered, and one in which the historically dominant warrior Bidân tribes were increasingly feeling marginalised from the centres of rent seeking; fish, iron ore and now petroleum. However, this

¹⁶⁷ Personal communication at meeting on 5 November 2006 with Junta-leader M. Vall on the day the researcher was decorated as Officer of the Order of National Merit for service to the country

move by President Taya proved to be a mistake, and the Taya regime's last days came in early August 2005. The irony of the situation is not lost on Ly Ciré, a Peulh resident of Nouakchott and keen political observer:

If Maaouya was watching the Oualad Nasr, [he was] monitoring the wrong ones! Because it is in fact his closest, most trusted colleagues, from an Inchiri tribe, the Oualad Bousba, who were the ones who carried out the coup [on 3 August 2005].¹⁶⁸

Despite its apparent multiparty setting and bicameral parliament, the regime had remained deeply militarised and autocratic, with power increasingly wielded by President Taya. So-called republican institutions were stripped of any power and they were simply used to legitimise a flawed democracy. The coup of 3 August 2005 was generally hailed at the time by the wider population, as an opportunity for the country to emerge from a situation commonly described as “a military regime in a civilian three-piece suit”.

On 3 August 2005, Taya was removed from power by Colonel Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Head of the Presidential Guard, General Muhammad Ould Al-Ghazwani and Abdel Aziz's cousin, Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, Head of National Security. The new government introduced certain cosmetic institutional and functional arrangements in order to retain its socio-political pre-eminence. Importantly for each coup member, but especially for Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, such institutional and functional changes would shelter them from any future legal action. Holding ultimate power allowed these Bidân military elites to protect themselves from any future obligations to render account for their past actions and particularly their handling of the 1989-1991 ethnic clashes.

They protected themselves after removing Maaouya by ensuring that the next president would grant presidential amnesty from prosecution to all government and army officials involved in the ethnic persecutions of that

¹⁶⁸ Interview 7E with Ly Ciré, 8 April 2011

period¹⁶⁹. A participant in the research is ex-2005 military junta Minister of Economic Affairs and graduate of the elite ENA institution in Paris, Mohamed Ould Elabed. Ould Elabed is a member of the Idawali tribe, a tribe that shared power during the reign of Taya and the Smacides. He had been Adviser to the Prime Minister for many years during Taya's reign, right up to the 2005 coup that ousted Taya. Ould Elabed, the "eminence grise" of many economic "reforms" by the government since the 1990s, is today a highly paid independent consultant to the government – as many high-ranking, ex-public servants continue to be (Samuel 2011, 25A):

It is clear that there were very strong popular feelings against the Maaouya regime. He had had more than 20 years at the helm of the country. People were fed up with his rule...And not only that, but he had been managing the country very poorly, and especially after the attempted coup of 2003. He had handled that explosive situation very badly, throwing many people in prison, seeking revenge on particular tribal groups and throwing their sons out of the army. It was too much, there was strong social resentment against him and it was clear that the Taya regime was living its last hours...

I thought it was Ely, but the more I think about it, the more it seems to me that the instigator of the coup was indeed [Mohamed Ould Abdel] "Aziz", and it is [Aziz] that brought Ely to the leadership of CMJD¹⁷⁰... [Although] I do not think it is completely like that, some say that "Ely was completely out of it". As Aziz [is said to] claim, "he had awakened [Ely] at three in the morning to offer him the presidency or, [if he did not accept] to throw him in jail".

I think that that is a total invention...Because those who know both cousins as I do, well know that the night of the coup, the evening of 2 August, Ely was clearly in contact with all protagonists of the coup and that he may have coordinated [some of] the action...I do not see Ely as a puppet.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ An amnesty for these crimes is believed to have passed into law

¹⁷⁰ Le Conseil Militaire pour la Justice et la Démocratie (The Military Council for Justice and Democracy)

¹⁷¹ Interview 45A with Mohamed Ould Elabed, 26 December 2011

Political instability and discovery of viable petroleum reserves

In the context of the discovery of petroleum in Mauritania, Foster (2011, 88) in a passing statement refers to an “oil curse” as “...a double-edged sword that eventually wounded rulers as well as ruled”. He thus suggests a link between the first discovery of petroleum, or “first oil”, in May 2001 and the several successful and unsuccessful coups that occurred in the following ten years. The majority of the Mauritanian participants in this study (87%), from an Afro-Mauritanian taxi driver to a Bidân Junta leader, rejected or were doubtful of any link between the coup d’états and the discovery of petroleum¹⁷². They pointed out, with varying emphases, to the dissatisfaction that the population felt with the autocratic regime as the main driving force of the 2005 coup. All participants felt that, despite the advances during President Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya’s regime, that regime no longer ruled effectively. Only 13% pointed to petroleum as the necessary and principal pre-condition of the socio-political upheavals that Mauritania suffered since the May 2001 discovery of the Chinguetti oilfield. The researcher expected a stronger stance against Taya and the power-grab by Smacide and Idawali elites from Mohamed Fall Ould Bah, a highly respected academic and writer on Islam, Islamic financial institutions and Mauritanian history, and member of an elite maraboutic tribe from Trarza:

No. For me, the discovery of Chinguetti and Taya’s overthrow do not seem linked. Maaouya was overthrown because we were fed up with his rule after twenty-one years. I think that that was the real problem.... With the overthrow, the military came, held civil elections and left... In my reckoning, we must say that petroleum was not present in Mauritania’s political reckonings.¹⁷³

Another participant, a Hartani youth, Abdou Salam (Ould) Tabane, thought oil had played a role in generating dissatisfaction with the regime but within the context of a wider concern over mismanagement over a long period. He

¹⁷² Appendix 9 and 10

¹⁷³ Interview 32A with Mohamed Fall Ould Bah, 13 December 2011

acknowledges that petroleum may have played a part, but that it was secondary to the root problems of poverty and social inequality:

Yes, there have been policy changes because of oil. There was political instability.... The power that was in place wanted, at all cost, to monopolise [government revenues] and make “its own management” [as it did in everything], which did not suit everyone....It created a lot of problems, and repeated coups that took place...2003 to 2005. Actually [more than the thirst for petroleum revenues] all this is due to the mismanagement of the state [by those] who wanted to monopolise all [government activities and revenues]... And let the other segment of the population suffer...Haratin, Harpulaar, Soninké and Wolof¹⁷⁴.

The Oualad Bousbaa, the Smacides and all [around President Taya] are the richest in Mauritania! These are the “whites”... The white Maures...they are the richest in Mauritania! They are the people who hold the power, the Smacides and Oualad Bousbaa... As President, as Prime Minister, and on “down” to ministers, managers and project managers...They are all Smacides and Oualad Bousbaa¹⁷⁵.

In the time [of Ould Taya], there was mismanagement. When the money flowed, some profiteered enormously.... These people made up the administration of Ould Taya. They were Smacides [plus individuals from the Idawali and the Oualad Bousbaa tribes] and they benefited greatly during the reign of Maaouya. The administration was rotten!

[This coup of 2005], it is a simple “change of chair”.... The Oualad Bousbaa tribe was there with the Smacides. The Oualad Bousbaa tribe has now moved Ould Taya’s tribe and it is on top, but it is always the same people, the same white Maure [Bidân] tribes! ¹⁷⁶

The opinionated young Hartani’s comments clearly downplay the role of petroleum and suggest that the coup was just another example of corrupt elite politics, which excluded the mass of the population. Petroleum discovery had indeed raised expectations among the population, but especially that of the

¹⁷⁴ This list would include poorer, less well positioned (more ‘distal’) Maure tribes not involved with The president’s entourage

¹⁷⁵ This is an exaggeration on the part of Isselmou, but was said to emphasise a point

¹⁷⁶ interview 44A with Abdou Salam (Ould) Tabane, 24 December 2011

elites (Foster 2011, 88-89). Their scramble for the reins of power, as Foster suggests, may indeed have found some further impetus in the potential of future petroleum revenues. However, their hopes were dashed when Woodside departed in 2007.

The root of this retreat by Australia's largest petroleum company, then a new player on the African scene lies in the misadventure that began in early 2004. The Chinguetti oilfield was trumpeted by Mauritians as a boon that would bring "Saudi Arabian wealth" to their country. However, the oilfield was far more complex geologically than anyone had anticipated. Complex geological challenges meant that extraction of hydrocarbons and development of the Chinguetti reservoir would require much greater efforts and expenditures on the part of the joint venturers than originally anticipated. This additional expenditure would make it financially unfeasible unless certain clauses were changed in the contractual arrangement that the joint venture held with the Mauritanian government.

The problems began with Woodside requesting amendments in the contractual terms of the original 1996 PSCs in 2004, terms that had already been revised in 1999 when, having entered the Hardman-Elixir Joint venture, it demanded easier terms than had been negotiated by the junior companies. By 2006, the confrontation between Woodside and the Junta of Ely Mohamed Vall had deteriorated to the extent that, having put down \$ 100 million on the table, Woodside finally "walked out" of Mauritania. The Australian Federal Government Senator Christine Milne, under parliamentary privilege, requested that the Australian Federal Police investigate Woodside because of suspicion of fraud and corruption. As detailed later in this chapter, these allegations resulted in an exhaustive two and half year inquiry into Woodside's dealings.

The exact terms of the original PSCs that came under review are not known, although certain terms that were supposedly altered are enumerated in an

official governmental note, dated January 2006¹⁷⁷. These terms were also publicised in a press release that the government of Mauritania distributed to the international media¹⁷⁸.

Woodside would not discuss the contract directly, and nor would the Australian Federal Police (AFP) respond to the researcher's calls for information. It has therefore been necessary to rely almost exclusively on the above-mentioned documents for confirmation of details. Nevertheless, participants in this research who had intimate knowledge of the Woodside operations in Mauritania were sought. These include one of the ex-Woodside Country Managers quoted below, who offered the further explanation that the amendments of certain clauses revolved around difficult operating conditions:

It occurred after I left, [but] I would hazard a guess that it was to do with the split-up of revenue and the terms and conditions for [the] deeper water [blocks].... When you explore, you find and you do your assessment of a reservoir, [and] it needs to work in terms of value and the investments it is going to take you to put in there to bring oil and/or gas "on stream". In addition, if any of those assumptions changed [since] you negotiated the contract, then you need to be able to go back to renegotiate... The parties need to sit down, talk about it and say, "Is this still economic? Do we still want to do it?" If the figures do not tally up, then there will be no desire to go forward with the development! On the other hand, if...from an oil company viewpoint [and] from a government viewpoint you are desperate for development...it is in the interest of both parties to agree [to new terms]...

Now, to answer your question, I do not know what the terms, [or] what the specifics of it, were because I was not there. However, I would hazard a guess that it revolves around "things" like that.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Appendix 8, "Mémorandum sur le différend opposant la République Islamique de Mauritanie à la société Woodside" (Memorandum on the dispute between the Mauritanian Government and the company Woodside)

¹⁷⁸ Appendix 7, Press release by the government of Mauritania on 6 February 2006

¹⁷⁹ Interview 53A with one of the ex-Woodside Country Managers, 22 February 2012

The requested amendments that Woodside believed would make the Chinguetti oilfield potentially viable were discussed with concerned ministry professionals and subsequently were duly presented to the then-Mauritanian Minister for Petroleum and Energy, Zeidane Ould H'Meida, the first interface with the government for industry participants. The ex-Woodside Country Manager kept close contact with the ministry and was aware of the procedural requirements to pass a decree or an amendment to a law:

We were always negotiating! It would have been with the ministry and the Minister [himself]...It would have gone to the Council of Ministers in the end. You know in that process, the Department, [the] Minister, [then from] minister to Council of ministers...then to the parliament [to the National Assembly and the Senate]... [Subsequently returned to Woodside and endorsed by parliament as a new decree].¹⁸⁰

The amendments were however returned “within a few weeks”, according to a reliable but anonymous ministry source. They were accepted by Woodside as having completed the official circuit, the amendments bearing an official signature purportedly indicating that they had been ratified as a decree. In view of the extremely short timeframe in which the signed document was returned to Woodside, it is unlikely that the official channels had been used. Onsite Woodside officials familiar with government interactions and processes should have been alarmed and called for an investigation into the ratification procedure that had been adopted for the amendments.

The official route for processing such a document is as follows: Firstly, once the document and its contents have been discussed with the Minister, it is then presented and approved for review by the Council of Ministers. It is then that the text of the proposed amendments is passed onto the Lower House of Parliament, the National Assembly. Thirdly, once approved by this Lower House, it is forwarded onto the Upper House or Senate for endorsement or rejection. Fourthly, if passed by both houses of parliament, it is returned to the

¹⁸⁰ As above

President for his final signature and promulgation as a new decree. In reality, this extensive and time-consuming procedure, which can take anywhere between six months and a year, seems not to have been followed.

Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, the 2005 Junta leader, blamed Woodside for failing to follow due procedure. However, the situation was not clear-cut, as testified to by participants intimately involved with the government at the time such as Mahfoud Ould Bettah. A minister of justice during the Taya years and one of 17 lawyers working on the Woodside dossier for the 2005 military junta, Mahfoud Ould Bettah indicates that it was not a simple matter of assigning blame to one side or another:

Investors [into Mauritania] must accept to work in full transparency.... During the negotiations, it became most evident [to us] in the way Woodside was insisting on the amendments, that it had colluded with the administration of that time over the amendments of these contracts.... Our objectives [in the subsequent negotiations of 2006] were [in the first instance] to lead Woodside to accept returning to the original contract... [Secondly], we wanted to make them pay a supplementary penalty fine to the Mauritanian state, but over which there were some negotiations.¹⁸¹

Disregarding the possible negative consequences for the continuity of the project if the amendments were rejected¹⁸² or even unduly delayed, Isselmou Abdelkader squarely put the blame for not following due process onto President Taya and the Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Energy, Zeidane Ould H'Meida. His testimony as an actor intimately involved with the government process, is compelling:

There were [Woodside] amendments [that were] “behind the scenes”, as it were. These amendments had not been passed by the [National] Assembly. That is why I was removed from the government. Because of these [amendments] and so, I should know...

¹⁸¹ Interview 47A with Mahfoud Ould Bettah, 29 December 2011

¹⁸² As they were eventually

I was removed from the government on 25 July 2004.

On 21 July 2004, when Maaouya [President Ould Taya] was still in charge, we were at a regular [weekly] meeting of the Council of Ministers. Zeidane [Ould H'Meida] was the Petroleum [and Energy] Minister.¹⁸³ It was Zeidane's turn to speak and he made a submission to the Council of Ministers saying that he wanted the Council's authorisation for him to approve [amendments to Woodside's PSC] agreements without going through the official channel. He was asking the Council of Ministers for authorisation to approve these agreements without going through the [due process of the council and subsequent submission for review by the two houses of parliament; the National Assembly and the Senate]... Ould Taya asked us, "What do you think of that?"¹⁸⁴

He [Zeidane] did not actually want to present it to the Council at all. He did not want to inform the Council of the agreements he was signing.¹⁸⁵

Taya put his question to all the ministers....He asked all the ministers to state their point of view. None of them spoke up, except me! I said to him, "Mr President, these oil resources do not belong to us. They belong to future generations. We have to manage them to defend the long-term national interests that are at stake. We have to be kept informed of what the minister is doing with this resource, these oil resources of ours".

To which Ould Taya replied, "That's right, I agree. Isselmou is right".

When [the] Council of Ministers' meeting ended, we went downstairs. Zeidane, the Oil Minister, came up to me and he said, "Isselmou, why are you always obstructing me? I've never obstructed you!" To which I replied, "I'm here to represent a country, I'm not representing a lobby... I represent the government, not Ould Taya's party".

¹⁸³ Zeidane Ould H'Meida is either a Smacide tribal relative of President Ould Taya or from a tribe closely related to the Smacides

¹⁸⁴ Note: The risk for Woodside was that the amendments would be publically debated at length, potentially lasting months, at a time when rapid development decisions were required. The amendments also risked being rejected without parliament comprehending that such a rejection would create an unviable situation for the joint venturers, forcing them to abandon the project.

¹⁸⁵ Or maybe had already signed as Minister of Petroleum and Energy?

We were having this conversation and the President's secretary, a young military man, came up to Zeidane and said, "The President is asking for you!" Off he went and took the lift [to the President's chambers]. He was gone for a minute, and he came back almost immediately. He tapped me on the shoulder as he walked past, smiled at me and said, "Hey ho! The President says I can do as I please!"

I was speaking with the Minister of Defence, Baba Ould Sedikh....Ould Sedikh is from a warrior tribe that's been in alliance with my own [the Idawali] since the 17th...18th century....He said to me, "May God preserve you, my marabou, from what we've just heard...[Inaudible]...I'm certain something bad will come of this!"

Three days later, I was out on my ear....I did not resign; I was "relieved!" I was fired. I was removed from office.¹⁸⁶

Even given the depth of information at the disposal of the researcher, it cannot be determined if Woodside pressed, persuaded or influenced the Minister Zeidane Ould H'Meida to push for the amendments to be ratified without the due process of parliamentary review, as per Senator Milne's accusations. Nor can it be ascertained that this may hide rent-seeking behaviour by a privileged few in government. However, it is clear that President Ould Taya acted autocratically and allowed Zeidane to sign the amendments in his place without parliamentary approval and, in addition, relieved Minister Abdelkader of his post for not towing the line.

Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall strongly supports the view that Woodside exhibited naivety and unprofessional behaviour. He may have personal or political reasons for criticising Woodside as a way of diverting attention from the 2005 Junta's mismanagement of the "Woodside affair". However, in interview, he argues that Woodside personnel were unfamiliar with the proper ways of doing business in Mauritania and that it was this that led to the failure of the negotiations:

¹⁸⁶ Interview 48A with Isselmou (Ould) Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

In this affair, Woodside's way of operating was totally opaque...[In addition] the Mauritanian public servants who were responsible for this [Woodside] file also worked in total opaqueness....Zeidane [Ould H'Meida, the Minister of Petroleum and Energy] didn't actually want to present [the amendments] to the Council [of Ministers] at all. He did not want to inform the Council of the amendments he was signing [with Woodside].

I believe that...examining this [mishandled] Mauritanian affair, they [Woodside] exposed themselves as total amateurs...Fumbling amateurs of the worst kind!

These events in Mauritania...It is pure amateurism.... They were really handled with the greatest of amateurism.... This means that they are people that have absolutely no idea...of what must be done [in handling people from another culture]! Do you understand?

What is sure, in my opinion is that in examining this file, it was very poorly managed....Even if they [Woodside] had wished to be dishonest...They acted like pure amateurs...They were very naïve and amateurish.¹⁸⁷

Woodside acted in a manner that frustrated the Mauritanian government, by being “less open and participatory than they might have been”¹⁸⁸. Woodside personnel were – and generally are – uncommunicative about internal proceedings and affairs unless and until necessary. This was despite the fact that the company's internal proceedings and affairs would often influence relations with outside parties, including joint venture partners and the host government. As a general comment, Woodside typically passes on information to joint venture partners in a formal manner, for instance, at technical and operating committee meetings. This leaves partners, and possibly in this particular case, their host government, uninformed concerning operations for most of the operating year¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁷ Interview 41A with Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, 23 December 2011

¹⁸⁸ Interview 43B with Mohamed Lemine (Ould) Dahi, 24 December 2011

¹⁸⁹ The researcher personally experienced this lack of communication as a partner in this particular project (as Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd) and can understand the frustration felt by the Mauritanian technical representatives that were personally involved with the operations

For the remainder of 2005, the Junta leader, President Mohamed Vall, left some ministers in place, most notably the Minister of Mines and Energy, Zeidane Ould H'Meida, as some system of management was required for dealing with the anticipated bonanza of petroleum funds.¹⁹⁰ The first task of the Junta was thus the drafting of the 2006 annual budget proposal for ratification by parliament, as well as the determination of the allocation of part of oil revenues to a Petroleum Fund "...for the good of future generations"¹⁹¹. The annual budget included the repayment of loan funds to Sterling Energy PLC¹⁹².

As originally negotiated with the authorities under President Taya, the Mauritanian government had a 5% free-carried stake after cost-oil¹⁹³. The agreement, as per normal practice, also allowed the government to opt to increase its participation in any development project through a pro rata acquisition from each of the partners, to an agreed aggregate maximum which, in the case of Mauritania's offshore, had been amended in 1999 to a maximum of 17.5%, as reported by the ex-Woodside Country manager.

Realising by 2003 that an early entry would be advantageous for Mauritania, Taya's government had set about to acquire the extra participation through Société Mauritanienne des Hydrocarbures (SMH), a newly formed parastatal company in which, it is commonly believed in Nouakchott, Taya's tribal relatives and collaborators had a substantial personal stake¹⁹⁴.

Given that the government had no real ability to raise the required funds, an arrangement was negotiated with the UK-based Sterling Energy PLC to advance the required US\$ 100 million for this acquisition, repayable out of

¹⁹⁰ Interview 43B with Mohamed Lemine (Ould) Dahi, 24 December 2011

¹⁹¹ As above

¹⁹² Public Limited Company, quoted on the second, AIM market in London.

¹⁹³ Cost-oil is the portion of produced oil that the operator applies on an annual basis to recover defined exploration and development costs as specified by the original 1996 PSC agreements associated with the offshore project.

¹⁹⁴ Personal communication, Ly Ciré 2011 and many others, Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians alike

future proceeds of offshore production. The request put by the government during the government-Woodside standoff during 2006 for a payment of US\$ 100 million by Woodside to the Mauritanian government was considered by some as a way of inflicting “punishment” upon Woodside. This was apparently attested to in government documents to have entered into the budget of Mauritania for 2006, although this “punishment” approach by the Mauritanian government towards Woodside is contested as hearsay by some Mauritanian and foreign actors involved, including the ex-Woodside International Exploration Manager:

The Mauritanian government had exercised their right to increase their equity to something like 17.5% equity in the [Chinguetti] project. They exercised those rights and they used a company called Sterling [Energy plc] out of the UK to finance the deal for them.... My understanding is that within their 2006 and 2007 budget, they had assumed that they would get adequate revenue from their equity participation.... However, I understood that they hadn’t factored in that they had to pay back their loan to Sterling, which, I believe, was \$ 100 million¹⁹⁵... within one year at the flow rate [predicted by Woodside].¹⁹⁶

The researcher brought up the entry of these funds into the government coffers with several key participants of the 2005 to 2007 Junta, including the leader, Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, the person most often accused of embezzling Woodside’s US\$ 100 million. If Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall was indeed guilty of embezzlement, the “greed” displayed by this highest-ranking Bidân elite could well be held up as an example of the “oil curse”.

At some risk to the researcher’s wellbeing, the General was openly asked if he had embezzled, in total or in part, the funds obtained from Woodside.

¹⁹⁵ Unrecorded casual discussions with high-placed individuals point out the government had scheduled this sum to be totally repaid within the following 2006 “bonanza” year, during the course of which some 75,000 barrels per day were expected to flow and generate over \$150 to \$250 million for the government

¹⁹⁶ Interview 52A, 30 January 2012

The question precipitated an emotionally charged answer, the General soon producing a, albeit poorly reproduced, photocopy of a 2007 official government document that detailed the entry of “Woodside’s” funds into the Treasury’s accounts¹⁹⁷. This document allegedly attests to his innocence. Several ex-ministers and opposition participants were also questioned over this issue. All participants in the research gave very similar accounts of the “Woodside Affair” and of the eventual destination of the US\$ 100 million. The most coherent was that of Mohamed (Ould) Lamine (Ould) Dahi, the General’s Chief of Cabinet, and the Head legislator for the country between 1992 and 2007, serving under both President Ould Taya and General (Ould) Mohamed Vall. In a long passage that negates one aspect of the purported oil curse, embezzlement, he gives this account of the situation at the time:

Regarding the origins of the “Woodside Affair”, it all started when the government was doing the groundwork for the 2006 Annual Budget. In order to prepare for this legislation, it needed to programme all its available resources. This preparatory work for the budget would have begun around end-October, early-November 2005. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economic Affairs and Development, together with the Ministry of Energy at the time, were involved, as was the governor of the Central Bank. This team worked on the draft of the annual national budget. Anyway, the President (Ely Mohamed Vall) asked them to draft the budget on the basis of the legislation that was purportedly currently in force at the time and with regard to the legal entitlements due to Mauritania, as included in the Chinguetti production sharing contract.... The starting point for their calculation was the [1999] Act [of law] that determined the agreement between the Woodside-led joint venture and Mauritania¹⁹⁸.

And so, they calculated the national budget on the basis of this 1999 Act and everything it provided for by way of revenue distribution, from the point of view of taxation revenue, direct taxes, indirect taxes and, and all the other benefits. They worked out an amount [due to the state

¹⁹⁷ Appendix 8 « Bilan de la Transition – Rapport sur l’activité du Gouvernement de Transition; 3 août 2005 – 5 mars 2007 avec une mise à jour au 29 mars 2007 »

¹⁹⁸ The original simple terms of 1996 had been officially amended with the government in 1999, on Woodside entering the Mauritanian venture, and the terms along with amendments had become an Act or a law

and available for the budget] in consultation with several ministries, consultations at which I represented Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, the leader of the “Military Council for Justice and Democracy”¹⁹⁹.

As Director of the President's cabinet, I attended the various meetings. We were asked to check the budget entries pertaining to the PSC revenue allocations with Woodside before any assessment was incorporated into the [final] draft of the Finance Act [Annual Budget] and before being presented to the Council of Ministers....It was thought wiser to check [our figures] with the company directly.

We, therefore, asked to discuss the [petroleum] revenue stream with Woodside for comparison with the amount of revenue that they were anticipating [for the 2006 operations]. We approached them, and the response...was “No, our figures don't agree with yours, because the PSC conditions have been amended! We have amendments here...1, 2 and 3... We have amendments here dated 2005. January, I believe. February 2005...Or it was March 2005...These amendments involved a substantial cut in your [revenue] figures. They involved a substantial cut in the government's share as provided for in the '99 law...in the '99 PSC decree”.

There appeared no malicious intent on the side of Woodside. Nor was there any from us....We were merely putting together the Finance Act [the annual budget] because oil production was due to begin in February 2006.... This petroleum revenue stream was to have been considered in the 2006 annual budget from the end of February 2006.

This was the groundwork carried out in preparing the annual budget²⁰⁰. When we told Woodside that, I believe the Head of State actually asked them to examine the issue with the government once more and more thoroughly [and] in complete confidence.... I believe it took something like two and a half months...from November through to December, January, Woodside continued to take a hard line with us, [saying] “The amendments are [in place], we've got the amendments”. ...They insisted point-blank on applying the 2005 amendments...

¹⁹⁹ General Ely Mohamed Vall never referred to himself as “President” because he insisted that this title should refer only to elected leaders

²⁰⁰ And the ground work which exposed the problem of appropriate funding through government's oil revenues as calculated by the Finance Department, but negated by Woodside

In the meantime, we started reviewing [our government documents] by ourselves. Woodside eventually gave us copies of the 2004 amendments. We started looking for traces of these, because in order to amend the 1999 Act [PSC decree/law] it would have been necessary [for these new amendments] to have gone through [and be presented and agreed to by] parliament. We looked everywhere, the National Assembly, the House of Representatives.....

What did we find? We found no trace of anything... We found no trace whatsoever! Not with the Council of Ministers, not with the National Assembly, not with the Senate, and not with the Council of Ministers secretariat that maintains a register and numbers all correspondence pertaining to legislative texts...[The document presented by Woodside] wasn't even numbered!...

So in the light of all that, we said to them, "Look, let's be careful here.... We've checked, but there's no trace of anything to do with these documents". Woodside showed us that the document was signed by the Minister of Petroleum [Zeidane Ould H'Meida]. It had indeed been signed by the Minister of Petroleum.

So we said to them, "Okay, but as a minister, the actions of Zeidane aren't binding on the government...His signature isn't binding on the government in this context. This is not a regulatory issue. It is not something that is determined by regulation! This acceptance of the amendments has to be determined by law. And, if you are going to amend a law, you have to follow the proper procedure! You are operating within a sovereign state!"

[Woodside] insisted that, in their view, the amendments were effective and had duly been executed according to the proper procedure. Therefore, if that is what we wished, the matter could be taken to the international court in Paris, or the international court in New York for arbitration. Our answer was a simple "Okay!"

The suggestion to do that, in short, came from them...Yes, it did. We wanted to avoid any conflict. We wanted to reach an amicable settlement. This wish was, in the first instance, because Woodside was the leading investor in this area, and secondly, [because the company] was [a] highly sensitive, and a very important operator in the country. We were thinking of the country's future. We were therefore prepared

to treat Woodside with “kid gloves”, and to show the greatest understanding for their position.... This was a highly sensitive industry as Woodside was a strategically important investor....

So, for the greater good of the country, we were prepared to go to great lengths to satisfy their demands and ensure they had a workable and stable climate in which to operate. We also wanted to encourage them to continue in this important work for the future of the country....

They were adamant, however, and they insisted on continuing to arbitration. So we said, “Okay. We will go to arbitration. In any event, carry on working as if nothing has occurred, we will not bother you. In regards to the Finance Act [annual budget], we will essentially put in what had been agreed [in 1999]. [Although] you refuse to accept anything else, we'll include in the terms of our Finance Act [annual budget]”. ...This is what we told them²⁰¹. “The law will in any event take its course, and on that basis, once the arbitration has been settled, we'll be in a position to redress the shortfall in our budget. But we'll do so in the spirit of legality, of respect for the legislation, of our reciprocal obligations as well as respect for the rights of both parties, not only the rights of the Mauritanian State but also those of the company”.

This dialogue went some way towards defusing the situation, [especially] when they realised that we were not trying to settle any scores, either against individuals or against the company. It was a combination of circumstances surrounding the drafting of the Finance Act [annual budget], which led us to the discovery that changes had been made to the legislation. The amendments we requested and were authorised without going through the normal legislative process....

That is how the “Woodside Affair” came about...Although the problem had already presented itself back in November [2005], it was not officially disclosed by the government until the President delivered a speech on the subject around mid-January 2006. Nevertheless, at the same time he also declared that the government was committed to protecting Woodside. He made a commitment to respect all their rights. He nevertheless also insisted that [Woodside] in turn should respect their obligations to the Mauritanian people and the Mauritanian State.

²⁰¹ There is some confusion in understanding Mr Dahi at this moment, but the gist of the conversation is retained

He insisted this was the context in which the two parties should go into arbitration. It should follow the most appropriate course, and in an atmosphere of mutual respect. So it was not a belligerent speech in any way, it was essentially a speech concerning the rights [of the parties] and their “positions”. At that point, having embarked on the process of arbitration, “the leader” nominated some 17 lawyers on the [arbitration] committee... Along with the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economic Affairs and Development, the (new) Minister of Energy and Petroleum [the Junta replacement and newly appointed], the Minister of Justice and the Governor of the Central Bank.... These made up the inter-ministerial committee that oversaw the affair on each occasion with the lawyers, with Woodside, and their international representatives.

There was indeed a lot of parallel mediation, going on in an amicable basis, going through particular individuals, going through... This all carried on until finally, after 2 months I believe, they came to us and said that the arbitration process was going to be an expensive exercise for both the company as well as for the Mauritanian State, and that it would be preferable to reach an amicable settlement!

For the purposes of reaching this amicable settlement, the same committee as before put forward its proposals. The principal [proposal envisaged] was to retain what was in the amendments changed by Woodside, or at least certain aspects of these, above all regarding the [altered] timeframe, because there were some scheduled deadlines that were obstacles that needed to be [rescheduled] for the permits! An acceptable accommodation was finally reached between the two parties with regard to finding a solution that would on the one hand not be too onerous, while, at the same time, allowing the Mauritanian state to be able to fulfil its budget obligations. Woodside was “ordered” to pay an additional premium in the context of the US\$ 100 million.²⁰²

This settlement, eventually reached after much internationally visible bickering and acrimonious interchanges – accepted by the Mauritians as “normal bargaining” – hit Woodside very hard. It was a heavy fine to pay for the company, whether negotiated by a new hardnosed CEO hell-bent on getting the company out of a difficult situation, or whether it was truly, a

²⁰² Interview 43A with Mohamed (Ould) Lemine (Ould) Dahi, 24 December 2011

calculated sum coerced from them by able negotiators in order to match the government's future revenue shortfall that came about because of the unlawfully obtained amendments.

Woodside did pay US\$ 100 million believing the Chinguetti project to be an economically viable operation, and not knowing it would very soon pull out of the technically problematic project. At the time, Chinguetti was perceived as a success model of Woodside's international exploration expertise and an example of the company's ability to engineer, build and operate a complex operation in a remote international location.

Were there other reasons that compelled the President of Mauritania to bypass proper parliamentary procedure? At that particular time, Woodside was no longer an "inexperienced and small international player from Australia", but a medium-sized international exploration and production company made up of highly trained petroleum professionals²⁰³. Many of these professionals, including its CEO, had had long and successful international careers. Thus, the accusation of a lack of cultural sensitivity levelled at Woodside and used to criticise its activities could be interpreted as a cover or an expedient "umbrella term" for other possible explanations.

One possible explanation is that the accusations of naivety levelled at Woodside by the Mauritians, was a smoke screen related to the internal politics of its ruling Maure elites. The key question as to whether the government or individuals in the government sought to extract rent from the company as an adjunct to a political deal cannot be given a definite answer.

Political pressures at home

For Mauritania, the period of 2006 to 2009 was internally a politically tumultuous period. The country received a great deal of negative press from the international media, particularly the industrial press. It suffered so much

²⁰³ Between 1998 and 2006 Woodside had grown in value from around AUD 9 billion to some AUD 65 billion, making it a mid-sized independent on the international scene.

criticism that Mauritania's country risk profile was raised by the international financiers' community after its honeymoon period of 2001 to 2005, and the raising of funds for exploration activities planned for Mauritania, became very difficult.

Woodside had not counted on a second threat during 2006, this time in the form of Australian Senator Christine Milne accusing Woodside of bribery and corrupt practices in Mauritania. It was "the straw that broke the camel's back", as far as Woodside's executives were concerned. The allegations of wrongdoing contributed to the myth that Mauritania was not a destination for the faint-hearted investor or operator. The researcher knew from his own experiences and his business and professional affiliations with many of Woodside's in-country personnel at the time that this idea about Mauritania was intensifying.

Senator Christine Milne's allegation of bribery and corruption was based on the claim that the payment of the US\$ 100 million made by Woodside to the Mauritanian government constituted, and was possibly part of further corrupt practices in Woodside's dealings in Mauritania (Augé, 2007, 125).

After some initial months of the predicted 75,000 barrels per day flow rate, production rapidly began to drop as the unexpectedly compartmented reservoir began to lose pressure²⁰⁴. On 29 June 2006, daily production had fallen to a low of 7,409 barrels per day. It recovered marginally for the rest of the year, but in 2007, it plummeted to 2,500 barrels per day.

Woodside did not carry out remedial work as the company tried to fend off the corruption allegations. The Woodside executive team headed by Don Voelte, the new Chief Executive Officer, lost heart because of mounting technical and human resources difficulties with the Chinguetti oilfield operations. Voelte began to make plans to concentrate the firm's activities on

²⁰⁴ Woodside country manager pers. comm., 2012

LNG from Australia's greater Northwest Shelf area and pull out of Africa as a whole, beginning with the sale of the Mauritanian exploration and production assets. The sale of the totality of Woodside's Mauritanian holdings to Petronas for A\$ 418 million was announced in December 2007. The sum was far below the Chinguetti partner's share of the approximately A\$ 1.5 billion spent on the exploration and development of the Chinguetti Oilfield²⁰⁵, and Woodside lost an estimated A\$ 233 million on the sale. More significantly, Woodside lost some credibility as an international player and, for a while, its appetite for ventures outside Australia, particularly into Africa. Agu Kantsler, the Director of Exploration for Woodside, recounts "the beginning of the end" for Woodside in Mauritania:

I only became aware of the demand on 6 February [2006] when Don Voelte disappeared and people said he was in Mauritania....He showed up a few days later saying that he'd done this US\$ 100 million deal.

After that, we had allegations by the Greens Senator Christine Milne that there was "obviously something untoward" happening. She accused...Woodside of bribery and corruption....

My personal belief was that she had taken legal advice as to what she could say and what she could not say, because she was very careful only to name the company. She got a very, very big headline out of that for a couple of days and then left us to pick up the pieces.

For Woodside, it was difficult in many, many ways²⁰⁶

Senator Milne's accusation was made very publicly in the Senate and was publicised in the media for a few days, [so that] we [then] had to deal with it publicly²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁵ Report accessed on the industry blog, Rigzone 27 December, 2007 "Woodside completes sale of Mauritania interest to Petronas"

²⁰⁶ Strong emotions showed on the face of this normally stoic individual as he recounted this period of his career in Woodside

²⁰⁷ Senator Milne was not approached for her views on the result of the AFP investigation

Our first action was to cooperate fully with the Australian Federal Police whom Senator Milne had requested to come in and investigate her allegations....

They spent 2 to 2 1/2 years going through all of our records in the Perth office and from the Mauritanian office... I do not know whether they went [to the Mauritanian office] but they certainly would have had access to it! They did find it was difficult to get any information from the Mauritanian government. I do know that was part of their report, but nonetheless after 2 to 2 1/2 years going through everything, we had, in a fairly thorough manner, they could not come up with any evidence of anything untoward.

Nonetheless, the damage that [Senator] Christine Milne did to the morale of our own staff, who felt that something might have happened, was incalculable.

Very, very disappointing for the management team to have to deal with something of this nature, especially given that the allegation was completely unfounded.²⁰⁸

For Mauritania, Woodside's departure in December 2007 precipitated a departure from Mauritania by other key oil and gas explorers who perceived a sharp increase in country risk. The inflow of investment dried up, and the effect, despite the now proven offshore oil and gas resources, manifested itself in years of delay in the generation of significant capital revenues for the government. No other activity approaches the revenue-generating capacity of the petroleum industry, including the country's iron-ore and fledgling gold mining industry combined, and today, in contrast to the roadside panels that appeared in 2002 heralding the new "Dubai of West Africa", Mauritania relinquished its hope of becoming a wealthy nation in the short to medium term.

The oil curse hypothesis perpetuates a view that a country touched by the "devil's excrement" is doomed to suffer disruptive socio-political and

²⁰⁸ Interview 51A with Agu Kantsler, 30 January 2012

economic problems, while the “wrongdoers”, whether evil oil company or greedy home-grown elites, are able to either continue to receive advantages plundered from the country and its ordinary citizens or retire free of any negative effects. The above narrative has shown otherwise, at least in the context of Mauritania. Foster’s offhand remark stated above, must be viewed in the context of a historically established and continuing political mechanism anchored in social institutions that are evolving but retain the primary character of the Bidân society developed over millennia of desert dwelling.

President Abdallahi and civilian rule

To understand the relationship between the modern institution of the military and the coup d’états from 2001 to 2011 and the seesaw between civilian and military rule, it is necessary to examine the civilian election of 11 March 2007 that brought the “old marabout from Brakna”, Sidi Sheikh Ould Abdallahi, to the presidency. Ely Mohamed Vall had stated that one of his main objectives was “the installation of a genuinely democratic form of governance, one on which the president – unlike before – would be limited to two five year terms” (Pazzanita 2008, 16). At the time of the 2007 elections, such talk was widely believed in the streets of Nouakchott to be political spin, a claim sustained in many conversations with people in varied occupations. Most Mauriticians believed that it was masking the true objective of the wealthy Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall, perceived to be a desire to emulate President Touré of Mali²⁰⁹.

Additionally, the “democratic transition” of Sidi Sheikh Ould Abdallahi (Foster 2011, 131) was soon used to mask a forging of new paths to power and wealth for the traditional elites, and it led to a regrouping of Mauritania’s tribal powerbrokers into lobbies that linked specific tribes such as the Oualad Bousbaa and the Smacides, or the Smacides and the Idawali. As already discussed, Mauritania’s political landscape is characterised by ethnic, tribal

²⁰⁹ In March 1991, the then-Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré had ousted a long-standing despot, Moussa Traoré. After a year of military rule to bring order to the country, Touré had ushered in a period of peaceful civilian rule that lasted twenty years during which time he was elected for two terms as president from 2002 until the Mali coup of 22 March 2012

and family alliances. Thus, in the setting of the colonially imposed Westphalian state and the institution of a professional army, the country's powerful lobbies became a contemporary extension of the traditional social forces "enveloping" Mauritians. These lobbies are the formal and informal institutions that influence tribal competition between Maures, as well as build and break alliances between ethnic groups in Mauritania today.

It is not surprising, then, that Abdallahi is perceived to be subject to manipulation by his political allies. M'Boye Ould Arafa commented that Abdallahi was a good man, "motivated by good will", and yet:

The problem [for Abdallahi] was, as always [the presidential] entourage ... Maybe his time was not ripe? He was not the ideal man for the job. Abdallahi nevertheless was motivated by goodwill...But then, the timing was not for him. The political environment was not suited for his style of government.... I think that he did not have the strength to impose his ideas on the [military] elites around him.²¹⁰

The Oualad Bousbaa and the Smacide elites became "tribal powerbrokers". This was an outcome of their existing wealth and influence built up through traditional activities as ubiquitous "commercants" from Senegal to Morocco, greatly increased through their virtual monopoly of activities peripheral to the development of the iron ore at Zouérat since the early 1960s. Many in this group were also high-ranking army officers, including then-Colonel Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. Meanwhile, Abdallahi, member of a maraboutic tribe of "small nomads" residing in the Brakna region south of Nouakchott, was viewed by the public as weak and merely a proxy for the "military elites". Several participants in this research painted unflattering portraits of Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, describing him as the "silly, old marabou from Brakna". Foster quotes the magazine *Le Monde* on Abdallahi (op. cit, 143):

[Although] some came to believe that...their presidential elections actually constituted a [democratic] model for the rest of the Arab

²¹⁰ Interview 28A with M'Boye Ould Arafa, 20 April 2011

world... There was no ambiguity as to how Abdallahi had been elected.... [President] Abdel Aziz “confessed” [to a French journalist] to interfering in the election along with other officers in favour of Abdallahi.... “in a country where tribes and clans still structure society, the military was able to weigh in to make ‘Sidiaco’²¹¹ win the elections, a man virtually unknown to Mauriticians.”²¹²

Others commented on the compromised political status of Abdallahi. For example, M’Boye Ould Arafa and Hamadi Ould Mohamed Hamadi, both respected members of the Nouakchott Bidân community, commented quite negatively on the civilian president and his military overseers:

In 2007, there was a return to “suit and tie”....It was the period of “Sidiaco” under the watchful eye of the military. Because it is they, who placed him there and eventually removed him. It could have been Ahmed Ould Daddah and it would have been the same.... The reason, to tell you the truth, is that the military, with everything [bad] that they had done, did not feel safe with a civilian president.²¹³

Abdallahi was a puppet...It is [Abdel Aziz and his lobby] who had chosen him...for [their] personal interests. Abdel Aziz was behind Abdallahi.²¹⁴

As Foster points out (2011, 137) Abdallahi was a weak figure, whom most power elites assumed could be manipulated as they saw fit. However, while “Abdallahi was soft-spoken and unfailingly courteous”, he did not continue long to play the puppet to Colonel Abdel Aziz and his military “keepers”, nor to his Oualad Bousbaa entourage which included his wife, a relative of Aziz and Ely. Mohamed Fall Ould Bah recounts:

²¹¹ Nickname used by the Mauritanian press for President Sidi Sheikh Ould Abdallahi

²¹² Quote in Foster (2011) from Jean-Pierre Tuquoi, “Les putchistes mauritaniens confortent leur pouvoir”, *Le Monde* 6 October, 2008

²¹³ Interview 28A with M’Boye Ould Arafa, 20 April 2011

²¹⁴ Interview 30A with Hamadi Ould Mohamed Hamadi, 20 April 2011

On taking “The reins of power” [on 19 April 2007], President Abdallahi was not as docile [as they had hoped]. He soon began to deal with people, who were not “simple” people²¹⁵. Close Friends and personal advisors suggested that he rid himself of the military [in government]....

The soldiers were very much weary of him, as he grew increasingly self-reliant, introducing policies they did not agree with. They tried to shield him from reality outside [of the presidential palace]. However, after a certain time, he began to “stand on his own two feet”.²¹⁶

[The military elites] began an operation of parliamentary destabilisation around him.... They created a situation of “parliamentary confusion” ... MPs who wanted to destabilise the government made a motion of censure and, after a certain time, the conflict [between the army elites and Abdallahi] reached a very high level...

In the end, He fired four of the army generals²¹⁷ and a couple of ministers from the government... There you are. In any case, among them were two very important and very close generals, the current President, and Ghazwani, the current Chief of Staff.²¹⁸

The highest seat of power had been coveted by both cousins, Colonel Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall and the newly elevated General Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz, upgraded by Abdallahi himself as the first acting general to serve in a government in the short post-colonial history of the country.

It had thus served then-Colonel, and now General Abdel Aziz well to have his “puppet” elected through the manoeuvring of the military. Abdallahi, moreover, incapable of extracting himself from his patrons, was also powerless to implement urgently needed reforms that he wished to enact (Foster 2011, 161). Graft and corruption became rampant and the population became displeased, with increasing public displays of protest marches, sit-ins

²¹⁵ For example, inviting Islamists into the government against the wishes of Abdel Aziz, whom he had recently promoted to general

²¹⁶ This created a new arena of conflict of interests that appeared between Abdallahi and the Military elites who had placed him there

²¹⁷ The four generals included General Mohamed Abdel Aziz, General Muhammad Ould Al-Ghazwani, General Philippe Swikri, and Brigadier General (Aqid) Ahmad Ould Bakri.]

²¹⁸ Interview 32A with Mohamed Fall Ould Bah, 13 December 2011

and other expressions of public disobedience. Abdallahi's mistake was in calling for a "government of national unity". For this new government, he insisted on membership for parties that did not conform to the military's view, such as an Islamist party in which it was claimed that several of his relatives held membership. His insistence angered General Abdel Aziz.²¹⁹

Abdallahi's most successful accomplishment – but also his second-most serious mistake – was initiating procedures for the repatriation of Afro-Mauritanians who had been forcefully exiled from Mauritania to Senegal during the ethnic violence of 1989 (op. cit., 164). Related to this, he began to question the blanket amnesty declared for all crimes committed by military and security personnel between June 1989 and June 1992. Personnel involved in these crimes had for the most part been soldiers and police of Haratin origin. Much more significantly, however, were many Bidân involved as inciters and leaders who now belonged to the high-ranking Bidân military and government elites, including General's Abdel Aziz and Ely Mohamed Vall. Finding himself opposed at every turn, the President Abdallahi fired his principal army patrons early on the morning of 6 August 2008.

General Abdel Aziz acted quickly "in order to attain his objective of being president after Sidioca" (Foster 2011, 141) as well as continuing to shield him and his Maure collaborators from accusations of ethnic wrongdoings in the 1989-1991 events.

Palace coup - 6 August 2008

Five hours after their dismissal, and using the presidential guard, the generals under the leadership of Abdel Aziz easily and peacefully removed Abdallahi from the presidency and incarcerated him in his home. Several research participants cynically acclaimed the popular saying that might have been a piece of propaganda circulated by General Abdel Aziz's entourage: "Better a good dictator than a poor democracy!"

²¹⁹ Personal communication with an anonymous member of Abdallahi's tribe, December 2012

Abdallahi's presidency was a time of the further resurgence of strong tribal loyalties, with the newly formed modern lobbies becoming increasingly repolarised through narrowing Bidân parochial interests (Ly Ciré pers. comm., 2011). Abdallahi's weak rule and the threat of renewed political upheavals encouraged self-preservation and a return to the safe haven of the tribe. Self-enrichment among the government bureaucrats became the order of the day, and many members of the governing class sought close ties to the military hierarchy for protection. This rapprochement of the government and the military was driven by the military men's need for legal protection, but also by the government's ability to bestow financially rewarding privileges. The government and the military were merged once again, despite the façade of "suits and ties".

Abdallahi's presidency also resulted in worsening conditions of the country's poor. As described by several research participants, the emergent oil industry generated rampant inflation and housing shortages but few benefits to the general population.

In a way, petroleum affected the presidency but in a somewhat different manner to that attributed to a classic case of the "oil curse". The promised wealth from petroleum had not materialised, generating much dissatisfaction in the Mauritanian population with few opportunities outside the oil sector in part a result of poor government decisions, but also because of the production failure of Chinguetti. Woodside, having suffered through a humiliating period, had departed Mauritania by late 2007. The late Gaye Silly Soumaré, a Sarakolé independent of the Bidân power play but well placed to understand the political climate of the times²²⁰, succinctly relegates the effect of petroleum to a minor role, overshadowed by the quest for position in the Maures' tribal hierarchy:

²²⁰ Gaye Silly Soumaré had been Minister in the first government after independence, later nominated as an Ambassador and more recently, acted as an independent Senator in the parliament

Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi cut wages and retrenched military personnel because there was no money... Money [from oil] had begun to flow [as promised by Woodside] at 75,000 barrels per day. [However] it quickly fell to 3,000 barrels per day, “nothing” compared to what was promised, of course! Many projects had been signed up, people recruited, trained, everything... All of a sudden, you cannot pay!

Is the second overthrow of civilian government [in 2008] due to oil? I do not think so.... People do not talk about oil... No!

The principal motivation for the 2008 coup d'état was that there was a man [General (Ould) Mohamed Abdel Aziz] who wanted power. The man wanted to be in power and he removed [Abdallahi] who was old, frail, and had not really wanted [to be president]... Yes, the promise of oil wealth may have, if you insist, [been a factor in this coup], but, I believe, a minor factor within the scheme of things?²²¹

In December 2007, the Malaysian state-owned company, Petronas, bought out Woodside's share in the joint venture, but failed to implement the large-scale projects that Woodside had planned or the remedial work that was needed. Foreign Direct Investment dropped from an unprecedented high of US\$ 814.1 million for 2005 and the period of construction of the Chinguetti facilities, to US\$ 139.4 million in 2007, to reach the lowest level since 1998, of US\$ 3.1 million in 2009.²²² Woodside's activities had created unprecedented employment and commercial activity that had touched everyone in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. Its sudden departure was a severe blow to the whole economy.

At the political and business elite level, the removal of President Abdallahi was loudly applauded by all, in the true Mauritanian style of paying tribute to the strongest:

Immediately a “Group for the Defence of Democracy” was formed, acclaiming the Army's “sincere endeavour” aiming to end “the corrupt

²²¹ interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

²²² World Bank 2013, Google online data,

regime of Sidi Mohamed Ould Sheikh Abdallahi that was deviating from the democratic path”... In typical fashion, the next day, supporters of the coup held a demonstration...a giant portrait of the Junta leader Abdel Aziz, materialised that morning and car-stickers expressing unfailing support for the coup appeared throughout Nouakchott.²²³

Long-time Smacide and Idawali supporters of Taya, together with traditional opponents of the Oualad Bousbaa, including the wealthiest businessmen in Mauritania, went to the palace, “humbly” paying their respects and pledging allegiance to General Mohamed Abdel Aziz. This shift in tribal alliances to “the strong” is the modern expression of basic survival learnt in the desert by a people renowned for their ability to adapt and prosper in the harshest conditions:

The soldiers are always [in power]! Nothing has changed! One time they come in uniform, the next they come in “suit and tie”... They are always there! ²²⁴

Constitutional coup - 18 July 2009

Soon after the coup, General Abdel Aziz, as head of the High Council of State, was greeted with open arms by French President Sarkozy on the tarmac of the Paris airport. A story is commonly told in Nouakchott of what Aziz said to the French president:

Oui, nous aussi nous voulons la démocratie pour notre pays. Mais laissez-nous la prendre à notre propre pas, à notre propre manière.²²⁵

Abdel Aziz knew and well understood France’s possible involvement in all ten coups that had disrupted Mauritania since independence. He was also

²²³ Foster 2-11, page 186

²²⁴ Interview 7A with Ly Ciré, 6 April 2011

²²⁵ “Yes, we too wish for democracy in our country, but allow us to be able to adopt it at our pace and in a manner suitable to our needs”..., a quote attributed to General Abdel Aziz and commonly repeated on the streets of Nouakchott

cognizant of France's continued presence and involvement in what was, and is still is, openly called "La FrancAfrique":

Unlike the Anglo-Saxons, the French did not leave "their colonies"... Ever... They helped Jean-Bédél Bokassa because it suited them, and when they no longer wanted him, they helped to chase him out....

The French are typical of this sort of interested behaviour; they do not leave their colonies. They continue to meddle and to keep their fingers in everything. Here in Mauritania, they still have power... Except during the period of Maaouya! It was after '98, I think he was angry with them over the issue related to the "Negro-African problems". ...He was smart, and went to see the Israelis because he knew the Israelis would bring the Americans.... He kicked out all French officers from Mauritania. He closed everything French. He arabised the country. As well, he tried to kick out the French language and generally made life difficult for the French between 1996 and 2005. For almost ten years, he made life difficult [for them]...

In the end, they were not beaten.... They stayed low until they could "help" with the coup [of 2005]... The French were behind [the coup of] 2005... As well as behind 2008! As well as in 2009! ²²⁶

By 6 June 2009, the military had obtained a formal resignation from Abdallahi, paving the way for the coming presidential contest. Destabilising his opponents by manipulating the timing of the electoral campaign, Abdel Aziz once more donned "suit and tie" as a civilian and wooed to his cause influential opponents in the country, as well as international support from France and Algeria. Having retarded the election process until he had acquired the support he needed, on 18 July 2009 Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz became an elected civilian President of the country and began his first 5-year term, which formally ends in April 2014, with a renewal to 2019.

Abdel Aziz soon proclaimed himself "President of the poor" (Armstrong, 2012). He had quickly recognised that the most important problem of

²²⁶ Interview 42B with anonymous elite Bidân, 24 November 2011

Mauritania was poverty and that for a sustained presidency, he would have to win over to his side not only elites, but also the wider population. His policies at least in the initial period, certainly touched the poor population of Nouakchott, attested by the long testimony given by this low-paid, Afro-Mauritanian casual worker, of which the following is a small extract:

Aziz is donating city land blocks and constructing housing for the poor, [and get them out of slums]... He is opening shops that sell daily needs, staples at low price for the poor....He sends fish and meat at low price for the poor. We are very happy...²²⁷

Abdel Aziz also publically acknowledged the fault-line between Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians. In an historical move, and in order to be able to stand as a candidate in the 2009 presidential election, Abdel Aziz was required to step down as Head of the High Council of State. He did so, but nominated Ba Mamadou M'Baré, an Afro-Mauritanian Peulh, to temporarily take his place for the elections. This was an unprecedented move, but the nomination of an Afro-Mauritanian Peulh as, albeit interim, Head of State impressed the Afro-Mauritanian population and won many of them over to his cause.

In 2010, President Abdel Aziz acknowledged the errors of the past, the injustices of 1989, Inal and the legitimacy of the deep grievances held by Afro-Mauritanians (Samuel 2011, 10). The ordinary Peulh in the street recognised the President's unprecedented move towards national reconciliation. However, even ordinary citizens understood that not all Bidân had that same objective:

I insist on the point that Abdel Aziz on his nomination as president went to the Afro-Mauritanians and said "sorry" for "Inal" and the 1989-1990 massacres....

On his choice of government, every Afro-Mauritanian was happy, but the Maures were not. We were happy because of a very good [ethnic]

²²⁷ Interview 20A with anonymous very low-waged Peulh hotel employee, 15 April 2011

mix in the nominations to governmental posts.... However, the [white] Maures were saying the Afro-Mauritanians had voted Aziz in!²²⁸

Abdel Aziz also won the Haratin, continuing to refine his approach to the “poor” population. He also recruited Messaoud Ould Boulkheir to his side.

Aziz scored well with the Haratin in Nouakchott [in the 2009 elections]. He had the correct political approach ready for that²²⁹. However, he failed to tailor his political arguments for the interior [of Mauritania, populated principally by Maures, their slaves as well as Haratin] and Messaoud Ould Boulkheir definitely obtained many votes from there.²³⁰

Indeed, in spite of some very acrimonious periods between them, President Aziz had also kept Messaoud Ould Boulkheir as President of the National Assembly, a Hartani from the Atar region and affiliated to the Smacides. Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, the most prominent and militant Hartani of the 1990s, had been named President of the parliamentary National Assembly by Maaouya Sid’ Ahmed Ould Taya, and had remained in the post for reasons that are maliciously said by Bidân opponents of President Abdel Aziz, to be solely to appease the Haratin population.

Over the years and as he got older, Ould Boulkheir became increasingly conciliatory towards Bidân rule. He remained quiet throughout the period of Ely Mohamed Vall’s military Junta to the overthrow of President Abdallahi by General Mohamed Abdel Aziz. He began to speak out in militant tones, becoming quite outspoken on the constitutional coup of July 2009 and Abdel Aziz’s continuation as a civilian President.

In late April 2013, as President of the “Progressive Popular Alliance” (APP) and party member of the “Coalition for Pacific Change” (of government) (CAP), Boulkheir called on President Abdel Aziz. He requested that the

²²⁸ Interview 20A with Ali Lamine Diallo, 15 April 2011

²²⁹ Retaining Messaoud Ould Boulkheir as president of the National Assembly

²³⁰ Interview 42A with anonymous Bidân, 24 December 2011

President allow the formation of a coalition of the leading political parties to come together and govern the country (“Mauritanie: le président de l’Assemblée nationale milite pour un gouvernement de coalition” 2013). His widely recognised calls for a government of unity and reconciliation were ignored to end-November (Spiegel, 2013). He could be striking now and urging this political position in order to sweep aside the weakening of leadership of a Bidân-led government. The government of Abdel Aziz has been racked by claims of; 1) nepotism (“Encore un proche de Aziz qui bénéficie de privilèges” 2013); 2) corruption (“Wikileaks: Encore des révélations gênantes” 2011) and; 3) embezzlement (“Mauritanie: Le président dans le collimateur d’une commission d’enquête sur les biens mal acquis” 2013). Politics is an everyday event in Nouakchott, one facet of life in which everyone has an opinion, to the humblest of citizen:

As I have told you, [Messaoud Ould Boulkheir] is a Haratin of [political] force to be reckoned with... If he [Aziz] had [publicly] sanctioned him, [the elections] may have turned out very different... It may have flared up ethnic unrest... Things would have turned out very differently, because the Blacks²³¹ would have said, “The President is going back to the old ways of thinking and acting, he does not give credence to “Blacks” and the “Whites” are [as usual] always favoured”. Today, look at the government, there are many Blacks. There are many black ministers. Nevertheless, there are still grave problems.²³²

Isselmou Ould Didi Ould Tajedine, president of the “Banque pour le Commerce et l’Industrie” (BCI), along with many of the business elites in Nouakchott, came to pay Abdel Aziz tribute and express their support, even though many had strongly opposed Aziz’s candidature. In spite of this sycophancy, Aziz replied by cracking down on the unchecked practices of these elites, although wisely choosing to target firstly wealthy individuals from within his own tribe. He then took to still noteworthy elites, but more distant from his entourage, such as Isselmou Ould Didi Ould Tajedine of the

²³¹ Note that here, the participant (a Peulh) is very significantly ‘lumping’ Afro-Mauritanians and Haratin together as one political force to be reckoned with

²³² Interview 8A with Habib Ould Adaya Ould Jiddou, 6 April 2011

Idawali tribe, who had to repay the Government the equivalent of several million US dollars, allegedly of funds “borrowed” on loan from the Reserve Bank, but more likely consisting of many years’ of unpaid taxes. Aly Coulibaly a chief waiter at a Nouakchott restaurant well known to the researcher made the following comments about Aziz and Mauritanian politics:

Aziz seems to have begun well when we said to ourselves “wait, he has caught all these ‘big wigs’ and has made them pay or put them in prison. It is sure that he will do well for Mauritania”... However, was this just “theatre” for our sake, for the sake of the masses? I just do not know. They were soon all released in any case...Bouamatou, he was campaigning with Aziz, and yet he was caught... Your friend the banker, Isselmou Ould Didi Ould Tajedine from the Idawali tribe, he too was also caught along with Nouegued and others.²³³

However, just as Mauritanian elites were paying homage to the powerful, fishing licences, exploration permits, services to the newly nascent mining industry, participation in renewed petroleum activities, as well as lucrative banking, insurance and foreign exchange services, began to flow once again to certain favoured lobbies and individuals (Bouna Chérif 2013, Moussa Diop 2013).

In the current era, the favoured individuals are often tied by tribal links to the Oualad Bousbaa, the President’s tribe. They may also now be linked to them through business ties, new ties that transcend established and traditional tribal affiliations, and dominate the economy of the country today. Abdel Aziz may well be praised, but corruption and nepotism have not disappeared from Mauritania, and the humblest of citizen recognises this:

Take the tarmac outside, for example. Who do you think had the contract for that? Of course, it is someone close to Abdel Aziz {laughter}.... There are even some who say it is [a company owned by] Aziz himself {laughter}.... You may ask “what about the steamrollers?” These are his! The trucks belong to the President! Those are his! Again,

²³³ Interview 31A with Aly Coulibaly, 21 April 2011

is it corruption? This is why I say it depends... There are several forms of corruption, I believe.²³⁴

An anonymous interview with the son of one of the senior members of the Bidân elite supports the view expressed by many that the country continues to be run in a manner that is undemocratic and based on tribal and class-like lines:

He [Aziz] is the boss.... It is a dictatorial system of government [that he runs]...I personally know the new president Aziz.... My personal wellbeing depends on the president, because he is a friend of my family....

This is the truth, to be honest...! I am not going to tell you that I underwent competitive recruiting to acquire this job.... I was hired because I am known to the president and his family...Exactly the truth!²³⁵

There is a clear willingness among today's foreign donors to support president Abdel Aziz's Government and an understanding in the World bank and the IMF that their departments are under current instructions not to pay too close attention to Mauritania's weaknesses "because it is dealing with certain difficulties" (Samuel 2011, 31). However, Ely Ould Sneiba, the Bidân political activist and a member of today's opposition, is adamant that serious corrupt practices continue, and that the West's policy of "closing its eyes" will one day backfire:

[In the days of Taya] everyone was plundering the country.... Taya based his system on the diversion of public funds. Aziz now comes along, and he is trying to do the opposite but not as you think... Aziz has not stopped this behaviour [of corruption and embezzlement]; he has reduced the circle of those who benefit! Taya was only one of many who benefited within his long administrations.... Everyone in government was involved in defrauding funds.... The cake was shared

²³⁴ Interview 31A with Aly Coulibaly, 21 April 2011

²³⁵ Informal interview (AUNS 110420) with a willing but anonymous participant, son of a wealthy Bidân Nouakchott businessman, 20 April 2011

by all [Bidân for the greatest part]. The spreading of pilfered government wealth was [much] broader.

With Aziz, that circle of people who benefit from embezzled funds has contracted, but the volume remains huge!

Whereas many [government] people were content to divert small sums of money in the time of Taya, with Abdel Aziz this is no longer possible. It is now only parents and collaborators close to the president those are able to divert funds. When they do, it is at least 500 million Ouguiyas, 1 billion or even more!

The funds that are now being diverted by these people are much larger than the funds diverted in the time of Taya.²³⁶

In mid-2013, Bouna Chérif and Moussa Diop both point out elite privilege in the Nouakchott-based online news website, “Le Quotidien”. Their comments reflect the general awareness of elite behaviour by the Mauritanian population; the ubiquitous involvement of the president’s tribe in the affairs of state; and the fact that fraudulent involvement in the extractive industry does not end with petroleum. At the newly acquired Kinross’s Tasiast gold mine, the Oualad Bousbaa tribe is alleged to have recreated a monopolistic business situation in which its members enjoy total supremacy, as reported by the French-based online “African Intelligence” (“Mauritania – Oulad Bou Sbaas deep into mining” 2013). Ex-minister Isselmou Abdelkader, an Idawali that in his youth had served as provincial governor stationed in the iron-ore mining town of Zouérat, understands first-hand the involvement of tribal factions in the extractive industry²³⁷:

There are ministers; there is a tribe, who grab money [illegally from the extractive industry]...

²³⁶ Interview 13A with Ely Ould Sneiba, 10 April 2011

²³⁷ Under the French in the 1970s and in the early period of independence, tribal members of the Smacide and Idawali tribe most especially benefited from the peripheral business activities generated by the iron ore industry centred in Zouérat

What is happening now is extremely serious, because if...tomorrow Ould Abdel Aziz is removed from the presidency... [Kinross] the Canadian company [who owns the] Tasiast Gold Mine will not pass a day longer [in Mauritania].... They will be “thrown in the sea”!

If [President] Abdel Aziz is removed from office, the people of Tasiast [Kinross] will not last! There are too many insinuations of wrongdoing.... How is it that all service contracts for the mine go to members of the Oualad Bousbaa tribe?

The Oualad Bousbaa, as you may already know, are also involved in the offshore operations [with Tullow Oil]? They are deeply involved in the offshore operations! They are everywhere and in every aspect of the business!

Today, in [the port city of] Nouadhibou, the international logistics and transportation company Schenker, has created a situation where all other transit agencies have gone out of business.... The company Schenker is associated with an Oualad Bousbaa businessman and it has taken all the transit contracts... It has taken everything! It is taken absolutely everything! [Very emotional outburst] It has taken all the transit contracts! It has taken all the work... All the markets in Nouadhibou for outsourcing contracts in the provision, of supplies, all of these are with the Oualad Bousbaa!

[When] there will be a change of president from (Ould) Abdel Aziz, the Oualad Bousbaa will be thrown out and there will be a strong backlash against the owners of Tasiast [Kinross]. [The company] will be thrown into the sea! ²³⁸

Conclusion

The petroleum industry established itself in Mauritania in a decade of renewed socio-political turmoil akin to that of the 1978 to 1984 period. Through the 1990s, there were moves to a more democratic system of government, but tribalism, nepotism, embezzlement of state funds, as well as racial discrimination continued, as strongly as ever.

²³⁸ Interview 48A with Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

The regime of the autocratic President Ould Sid'Ahmed (Ould) Taya was overthrown on 3 August 2005 by close collaborators who promised to bring democracy. After 18 months of military rule under the Junta leader Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall and a stormy period for the petroleum industry, a civilian government headed by a weak president, Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi, ruled for some 15 months. Corruption and embezzlement of public funds reached new heights and the shortage of funds generated by the non-performance of the new oil industry created a difficult environment for a weak president and a divided parliament subtly domineered by the military.

The coup that ousted Abdallahi on 6 August 2008 was termed a "Democratic Rectification". General Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz took the helm and once more on 8 July 2009, in what can be termed a "Constitutional Coup", he donned "suit and tie" to become a civilian president, his rule continuing to date.

As self-proclaimed "President of the poor" and for the benefit of the country, President Aziz from the beginning of his ascent to power, encouraged an expansion of the extractive natural resources industry principally in gold and petroleum exploration and production. Attempts were also made by Saudi entrepreneurs to amalgamate and develop agricultural lands in the Senegal River valley, but this has seen little progress with strong resistance from the traditional inhabitants, the Black population of that region.

Despite recent advances in the mining and petroleum industries, however, the infiltration and involvement of the president's tribe and collaborators in the industry, with overt nepotism, corrupt business practices, and the embezzlement of funds, augurs badly for the continued stability and long-term commitment of investors in exploration and exploitation in Mauritania. The promises of the petroleum industry fizzled out after being so great upon first discovery in 2001. The population has lived through petroleum industry-induced inflation and the collapse of the Smacides with the fall of Taya, with

revelation of massive and systematic “fraud and embezzlement” by the elites (Samuel 2013, 13).

This chapter has argued that political instability pre-dates the discovery and development of oil resources in the 2000s and that continuing political instability from 2001 to date is the result of a range of factors of which the promise of oil revenues is only one.

While petroleum discovery and development in the period 2001 to 2011 played a role in encouraging rent-seeking behaviour among sections of the ruling groups, such behaviour has many causes rooted in the history of pre-colonial, colonial and independent Mauritania. Chief among these causes are: the relative poverty of the country, the patrimonial nature of the state centred on personal and tribal politics, the on-going political and military influence of France, the domestic political supremacy of the Bidân and their economic and ethnic domination of the state and key revenue sources, and the continuing centrality of sub-national loyalties in the country’s social, political and economic life.

In the next two chapters, a more detailed examination of the oil curse idea is provided and its applicability to Mauritania.

Chapter 5 – The “Oil Curse” theory

In the literature on the relationship between political instability and natural resource development, considerable attention has been given to what has come to be known as the ‘resource curse’. The term refers to a number of arguments centring on the presumed detrimental economic, social, political and security changes, or a combination of these, associated with the discovery and development of natural resources, particularly oil, natural gas, or other valuable mineral deposits. Proponents of the “resource curse” paradox, or the “oil curse” paradox if specifically referring to petroleum, claim that countries with abundant natural resources, and specifically those that have or will generate wealth from point-source non-renewable natural resources like diamonds, gold or petroleum, suffer retarded or distorted economic, social, political and security growth paths (Bates 2010, 90).

The aim of this chapter is to review the varying oil curse debates that have emerged and have culminated to the present debate on the relationship between oil development and political instability in Mauritania. It provides the conceptual background to chapter six, which examines the application of this presumed relationship to Mauritania’s period of socio-political instability from 2001 to 2011. It was during the early part of this period that attempts began to be made by the industry players, in conjunction with the Mauritanian Government, to establish and develop a viable oil industry.

The petroleum industry

The global petroleum industry has increased rapidly in size and influence, especially over the last 50 years, and today accounts for 90% of the world mineral trade by value (Ross 2012, 1). It is the single most valuable commodity traded on international markets (Colgan 2013, Kindle Loc 161). Oil and gas are needed for energy production but they are also vital to many industries such as the food, medical and transport industries. This continuous worldwide rise in demand has led to an increasingly wider search for crude reserves.

Increased worldwide demand for oil and gas means that, as traditional reserves deplete, exploration companies intensify their efforts to find resources in other countries. This has resulted in an increasing number of poor and underdeveloped countries more distal to end-user markets entering the realm of exploration, production and worldwide distribution (Hicks, Mthembu-Salter and Ware 2013, 80). Demand has been steeply accelerating, especially in Asia, and particularly China and India, where reliance on imported petroleum has increased substantially over the past 25 years. Since China, for example, became dependent on imported petroleum in 1993, it has overtaken Malaysia to lead the charge of Asian interests into Africa.

Meanwhile, numerous companies – juniors, independents, supermajors, private, public and parastatal – from developed countries have also increased their activities in all parts of Africa. Junior public and private exploration companies have proliferated in the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia. With regard to Mauritania, some 40 of these companies scrambled for permits after the 2001 discovery of the Chinguetti oilfield.

Many developing countries have comparatively moderate fiscal terms, which have made them attractive as investment destinations. In addition, they are particularly attractive because their environmental and other regulations are generally less stringent than in developed states. Furthermore, their need for foreign investment allows foreign oil companies to negotiate favourable terms and early start-up dates.

The preference by explorers over the last few decades for pioneering ventures into less restrictive developing countries partially explains the perceived link between the increased discovery of oil (and minerals) and economic growth in low-income countries (Ross 2012, xiii).

Mauritania is an example of a poor developing country that has only lately become the focus of significant petroleum and mining activity. The country

was ignored as a suitable exploration and development destination for many years. Then in 1998, Woodside joint-ventured with the private company, Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd, and the junior ASX-listed Hardman Resources Ltd, to begin an extensive exploration program in the search for offshore petroleum (in offshore petroleum Blocks 3, 4 and 5). Mauritania had re-entered late as a destination for petroleum activities. However, the discovery of a viable oilfield with the first well drilled by Woodside in 2001, only three years after exploration activities had begun, marked the country out, at the time, as a most attractive investment destination.

Approaches to the resource curse thesis

As the frontier of prospective regions expands, many developing countries have indeed proven to be rich in natural resources, but have also proven to be prone to political instability and varying levels of social and political unrest. Several commentators, and most prominently proponents of the “oil curse”, draw a close but at times questionable connection between petroleum finds and political instability as well as other negative conditions. These links are perceived to exist whether or not the instability was already entrenched in a country, as in the case of Mauritania, or whether it arose only with the discovery of petroleum. The increasing tendency for petroleum explorers to target more “distal” underdeveloped and developing countries is considered by some commentators as a major problem for these countries. For example, Ross states that:

Petroleum wealth is overwhelmingly a problem for low-income and middle-income countries, not of the rich, industrialised ones.²³⁹

He goes on to state that;

²³⁹ Ross 2012, page 2

These countries suffer from authoritarian rule, violent conflict and economic disarray **because**²⁴⁰ they produce oil and because consumers in oil-importing states buy it from them.²⁴¹

Clarke enumerates the ill effects attributed to the “oil curse”, especially as it purportedly applies to Africa. He pinpoints poor governance, a decline in trust between the government and the people, erosion of the rule of law, corruption, rent seeking, struggles for political leadership, lack of diversification of industry and the crowding out of investment in human capital. However, he also argues that an African nation’s unique socio-political landscape and history need to be given serious consideration:

What is considered bad for the rich and liberal societies elsewhere in the world, does not always have the same resonance within Africa...I see it as...a [lack] of recognition of the balance of socio-economic forces embedded in the [African] historical landscape... [And] Western impatience to “fix” Africa in its own image...is at the root of this problematic situation described as the oil curse.²⁴²

Clarke also challenges the negative link between petroleum and economic, social and political instability:

It became ultrafashionable to blame the development and commercialisation of petroleum for the social, economic and political ills that befall a country, especially in Africa.... Attributing a country’s ills to the revenues derived from an important natural resource can have profound deleterious implications for the government policies formulated to reducing underdevelopment and for sustained development of indigenous resource.²⁴³

Clarke argues that the direct link between weaknesses in governance, dishonest government officials and the oil industry is at best tenuous, requiring empirical evidence (2008, 526). More recently, Revers (2013, 64) attests that

²⁴⁰ Emphasis in the original text

²⁴¹ Ross 2012, page 3

²⁴² Clarke 2008, page 59

²⁴³ Clarke 2008, page 4

many African countries have thoughtful and wise governance, including sound plans for the future path of their nation. They are also judicious in their formulation and application of resources policies.

The ‘resource curse’ thus refers to the paradox that many countries with an abundance of subsoil, point-source and non-renewable natural resources such as minerals or hydrocarbons, tend to take a distorted development path as this endowment is discovered and developed usually for export. This distorted development path is said to manifest itself in various economic, political and social ways, depending on the particular research focus and theoretical orientation of the researcher.

When referring to hydrocarbon endowment, this detrimental effect is termed the ‘oil curse’. Below are reviewed the various approaches to the oil curse, focusing on the relationship between oil and political instability.

An early economic approach

The earliest approach is referred to as the ‘Dutch Disease’. It is based on the economic consequences of a ‘disease’, following the 1950s discovery of hydrocarbons in the Netherlands that include inflation and distorted economic activity in which windfall hydrocarbon revenues, for a country when applied generically, led to exchange rate appreciation and a flight of human capital and funding from other economic activities towards the emerging petroleum activities. Other detrimental effects can be excessive borrowing during relatively short boom times, followed by debt-overhangs caused through international market downturns and sharp increases in the cost of borrowing. This was especially evident with African petroleum producers in the 1980s when escalating interest rates in the US and the utilisation of anti-inflationary measures by the Federal Reserve sparked a sharp global downturn in economic activity and trade (Bates 2010, 70). Other economic ill effects claimed to be associated with resource abundance include a lack of interest in nurturing economic diversity (Le Billon 2005, 19) and the formation of economic

enclaves surrounding the extractive industry to the detriment of other industries (Basedau 2005, 10).

The general concept of economic ill effects resulting from an abundance of natural resources is not new. This is evident in Ross' reference to Jean Bodin's satirical comparison of "effeminate and cowardly...men of fat and fertile soil" with "industrious, temperate men... [made so by] barren land" (Ross 1999, 309). Development debates from the 1950s to the early 1970s were dominated by competing models, including dependency theory, with each proposing different ways of raising living standards in developing countries, some arguing that the prospects for poorer countries to raise their living standard were constrained by the control of their economic and political development by richer nations and transnational corporations. One of the early proponents of this last viewpoint was the Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, Raúl Prebisch (1959). He reviewed the economic performance of South America and suggested that natural resources had a negative impact on economic development (Lederman and Maloney 2007, xiii). Initially, he argued for import substitution policies to enhance national manufacturing capacity and reduce dependence on high priced foreign manufactured goods produced in richer countries. This view changed to a wider critique of the global trading system in which it was argued that poverty in developing countries was a product of dependent development over several centuries rather than an original condition. He emphasised the inequities in the global terms of trade and the importance of increasing the political power of developing countries as a means of promoting improved national economic outcomes and reforming the global trading system. Dependence on raw material exports, particularly agricultural and mineral products, was a symptom of wider historically generated inequalities in the political economy of global power.

Prebisch's dependency view of economic development, which focused on state-led strategies out of poverty resurfaced in Terry Lynn Karl's "The paradox of plenty: Oil booms and petro-states" (Karl, 1997). Karl emphasised

that the capacity of a state to fashion its own social, economic and political development trajectories is dependent on the origin and management of its revenues, as exemplified by the Netherlands in the 1970s (1997, 222).

Several commentators analysed the negative economic and social effects of gas production in the Netherlands in the second half of the last century, and the effects were collectively referred to in *The Economist* as the “Dutch Disease”²⁴⁴. The production of gas from the giant 100 TCF²⁴⁵ Groningen gasfield discovered in 1959 at first negatively affected the social and economic trajectory of the Netherlands. In the immediate aftermath of the unprecedented discovery of this large reservoir of natural gas – the largest gasfield in Europe and the tenth largest in the world (Whaley, 2009) – the government was unable to contain inflation caused by the labour and material demands of the newly established petroleum industry. The Dutch currency grew rapidly in value, which in turn hampered the country’s ability to export other primary and manufactured products. The finite domestic and foreign investment pool became increasingly focused on this new industry, putting further constraints on more traditional economic activities.

However, over the longer term, gas from Groningen provided an important net benefit to the country’s economy, a reality contrary to the ready impression of a “curse” of long-lasting detrimental effects. While the Dutch petroleum industry expanded, inflationary pressures did initially create a recessionary environment. However, timely remedial action taken by the government averted a full-blown recession. The discovery at Groningen encouraged further exploration, resulting in the creation of significant long-term wealth for the Netherlands as well as for other countries surrounding the North Sea. In the Netherlands, pipelines quickly spread across the landscape and most houses rapidly converted to using cheaper and cleaner natural gas as their primary energy source. Gas from Groningen, the first gas producer and exporter in the North Sea, is still being produced today, enabling the Dutch

²⁴⁴ *The Economist*, November 26, 1977

²⁴⁵ TCF = Trillion cubic feet

government to use foreign revenue to maintain a high standard of living for its growing population, as well as continue encouraging diversification into other wealth-producing activities as a means of reducing dependency on hydrocarbon revenues. While there were negative economic impacts during the initial establishment phase of the petroleum industry in the Netherlands, implementation of appropriate government policies and the resolve to follow them, resulted in far more significant longer-term benefits for the Dutch economy.

Groningen has now reached maturity and other gas fields and industries are beginning to replace it. The Groningen windfall discovery brought huge benefits to the then-impoverished Netherlands, benefits that are now taken for granted by the wealthy developed nation.

Thus, while natural resource development can have negative impacts on a country's economy and society, proper management can turn this around and result in major gains for a country.

The purported link between petroleum and economic volatility is claimed to be observable in many other countries. Auty and Pontara (2008) suggest that perceived natural resource abundance produces institutional weakness, but they do not elaborate on whether there may be a reverse causality operating, that is, that some petroleum explorers may, by choice or through necessity, choose to explore in institutionally weaker, more "distal" states. A pertinent example is the involvement in Mauritania of Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd, a very small, maverick African pioneer, and the equally small and insignificant petroleum explorer, Hardman Resources Ltd. Although these companies are small by world standards, they were nevertheless able to obtain major petroleum concessions in Mauritania because of Mauritania's poor economic circumstances and its corresponding readiness to facilitate the start-up of a potentially revenue-generating project. It can thus be argued that perceived institutional weakness that already exists in such countries attracts investors

who believe they can operate more easily under such circumstances, and not the reverse causal argument that such investment weakens these institutions.

In a paper reviewing economic data used by Sachs and Warner (1995) to argue the resource curse thesis, Brunnschweiler acknowledges that in some countries the seizure of resources rents by incumbent politicians is unlikely to promote economic growth. However, emphasising disparity between *abundant resources rents* and *resources dependence*, she goes further in suggesting that resource wealth does not impede economic growth. She finds a positive, direct empirical relationship between natural resource abundance and economic growth, with particularly strong positive resource effects in subsoil mineral and petroleum wealth (Brunnschweiler, 2008). Likewise, in the foreword to Lederman and Maloney's "Natural Resources: neither curse nor destiny" (2007, xiii), Guillermo Perry, Chief Economist for Latin America and the Caribbean states, "it is true that wealth can be wasted and lead to destructive behaviour... 'rent-seeking' activities and even civil strife... the conclusion seems quite robust: overall, natural resources wealth is good for development".

Resource development and socio-political effects

Social and socio-political ill effects are also considered potential results of petroleum discovery and exploitation. These may include decreased investment in human resource development and a growing disparity between rich and poor (vertical inequality) and between localities and groups (horizontal inequality), causing intercommunity grievances and leading to unrest and potential conflict (Brown and Stewart 2012, 254). Other proposed negative effects of the petroleum industry are increases in human rights abuses, distorted fiscal regimes, dissociation between government and citizens, and sharp increases in corruption, embezzlement, fraud and nepotism (Clarke 2008).

Campbell (2009) suggests that a crowding out of investment in human capital because of a concentration on capital-intensive export-earning activities,

results in regional and community socio-political imbalances between resource-wealthy and resource-poor parts of a country (op. cit., 15). Caselli (2006) takes the view that oil wealth shapes the actions of the ruling groups of a country. He argues, “Political scientists have long held the view that the reasons for the resource curse are to be found in the behaviours of those that control the state” (Caselli 2006, 2) . He goes on to say:

“Natural resources are more easily appropriated by the governing elites than other sources of wealth, such as the output of the industrial sector”.²⁴⁶

This leads to growing political instability:

“as a result, countries with large amounts of natural resources experience power struggles, in the sense that potential challengers have a stronger incentive to seek to replace the existing government by means of coup d’états, or other forms of forced change in leadership”.²⁴⁷

Caselli builds his case with examples from sub-Saharan Africa. He examines activities that influence the flow of consumption goods, and focuses on both larger scale exploitation of natural resources and small-scale agricultural and artisanal production. He also appraises the revenues that a government obtains from these activities and examines the available methods that can maximise the value of use of these revenues. He then reviews these parameters in the light of the possible behaviour of “talented” agents, leaders and would-be leaders, and the choices that are available to them. The empirical evidence he brings to his model suggests that a natural resource “curse” operates through the behaviour of political elites that do not invest in the long-term development of their country. Nevertheless, he concedes, touching on the present argument, that the mechanism through which the “curse” operates is not readily discernible. He concludes that explanations as to how or why instability occurs are often based upon assumptions because, in reality, the

²⁴⁶ Caselli 2006, page 2

²⁴⁷ Caselli 2006, page 1

causes of political instability are opaque and complex and the data to support the precise identification of a root cause, difficult to identify.

Collier and Hoeffler focus on the link between primary commodity dependence and the risk of civil conflict. They affirm that resource rents are a catalyst for conflict, and that:

Whether or not natural resources increase the risk of rebellion, they change its intent: Opportunistic rebellions presumably are even less likely to lead to good eventual outcomes than ideologically motivated rebellions.²⁴⁸

They contend that ill effects are present, nonetheless, only where institutional structures - as opposed to individuals actors - are weak and public governance is low (op. cit., 630). Collier further contends that conflicts are especially provoked when different groups and factions fight for their share of returns on resource revenues (Collier, 2007). Contrary to several proponents of the resource curse, Collier finds explanations for conflict neither in the behaviour of elites nor in immediate political circumstances that he regards as merely symptoms of underlying causes. Instead, he points out that unequal economic apportioning is detrimental to socio-political stability, and specifically states that “[being] poor is dangerous”²⁴⁹ and that underlying all symptoms of conflict are grievances in the wider community.

As in the present thesis, rather than blaming the petroleum industry for political instability, Collier postulates that the answer may be found in the historical, geographical and socio-political context of divisive ethnic groups and conflict-prone formal and informal institutions (Collier 2009, 121-137).

Humphreys seems to argue that there is no such thing as a natural resource “curse”. In its place, he postulates that the structural features of a state and its

²⁴⁸ Collier and Hoeffler 2005, page 627

²⁴⁹ Collier 2009, page 125

social relations pave the way for detrimental socio-economic and political effects. Indeed, the purported curse could be thought of as brought about by crooked, opportunistic elites, as it may act through the desires and calculations of a small number of political actors, constrained, nevertheless, within the political and economic institutions in which they exist (Humphreys 2005, 522). This “curse”, however, could occur within any society, resource-rich or not, and oil is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for instability. Caselli (2006) likewise finds empirical evidence to suggest that conflict operates through the behaviour of political elites that fail to invest in sustainable, long-term development. It is not an oil curse operating, but it is the ineffective nature of a political system and the aspirations of individuals, oil becoming a weapon of elite domination and reinforcement to their power. The oil does not cause the domination of elites but intensifies it, allowing further consolidation of elite power.

Lowi (2009, 34) explains that when the principal activity of political elites is the distribution of rents and not the promotion of productive activities, then the arrangement becomes a self-propagating institution. A system of rent distribution to influential powerbrokers becomes permanent because it gives long-term political stability to rulers and their allies, and to the distributary system including rent-seeking tribal, clan or family relations. Thus, the system of rent-distribution is created in order to lengthen the tenure of power by the strongest of the paternalist political leaders. She concurs that there are many examples of oil states that take the “allocation” path instead of the “production” path in situations where economic incentives to access oil revenues are perceived by political elites to outweigh production activities. In such cases, the political elites have the choice of adopting either an “allocation” or a “production” avenue.

The final agency decision taken is, nevertheless, guided ‘invisibly’ within the context of a complex of nested and interrelated institutions and institutional

requirements and limits²⁵⁰. Despite an apparent freedom of choice, whatever the decision, leaders are fundamentally constrained by their own community's traditional values and behaviours. Elite power in the face of petroleum industry revenue does not necessarily result in unbridled political warfare over the wealth at stake. Power is exercised and wealth is distributed in developing African countries in a far more sophisticated manner, albeit often foreign to Western custom. If there is wealth to be had, then its journey into the hands of the people traverses deep and complicated socio-political structures that often have centuries-long histories.

Lowi (2009) does modify her initial perception of the importance of elite agency, and gives increasing attention to matters of institutional and contextual control guiding leaders' choices and outcomes. She asserts that oil is not "naturally cursed", and points out the diversity of responses to oil wealth:

Oil rents have been pointed to as the cause of political quiescence (Crystal 1990), but also the rise of opposition (Okruhlik 1999); political instability (Karl 1997), but also stability (Hertog 2006); the turn to democratisation (Levine 1978), but also the persistence of authoritarianism (Crystal 1990; Vandewalle 1998).²⁵¹

Shaxson, the principal proponent of the "oil curse" theory in Africa, is the author of the provocatively titled, "Oil, corruption and the resource curse" (2007b) and "Poisoned wells: The dirty politics of African oil" (2007a). He argues that mineral dependence is indeed a curse for developing nations because, adhering to the Dutch Disease model, it stunts economic growth. He asserts that it also leads to increased frequency of conflicts, reduces the possibilities for more democratic forms of government and increases corruption (Shaxson 2007b, 1123). Clarke (2008) criticises Shaxson's argument for exaggerating the role of petroleum and underestimating pre-existing social fragmentation, traditional forms of political authority organised

²⁵⁰ Apologies to St Augustine

²⁵¹ Lowi 2009, page 35

around sub-national political loyalties and other inherited social structures such as tribalism. Clarke also points to the role of endemic and institutionalised ethnic poverty as a driving force - and not an outcome as Shaxson argues - in weakening state authority, contributing to low-level and high-level corruption and pertinently, intensifying sub-national rivalries.

Nevertheless, Shaxson's argument is echoed by several other commentators who simply seem to accept the idea of an oil curse without the need to argue the case and possibly having their own agendas. For example, in a popular blog article entitled "Rethinking the oil curse" (Tierney Lab 2008), John Tierney argues a country with poor institutions that "suffers" an oil windfall will succumb to power politics and be torn apart by civil unrest. He proposes a plan to distribute wealth directly to citizens, through a "pension scheme of payments similar to Alaska's". He makes the point that this would divert resource wealth away from the government and avoid "corrupt influences". Thus, as Tierney sees it, this plan is the best way to stop the ills caused by "blighted filthy crude" (Tierney, op. cit.). Another oil curse proponent is Thomas Palley, a prominent United States-based economist who served as the chief economist for the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission and is currently the Schwartz Economic Growth Fellow at the New America Foundation, a US think tank. Both Shaxson and Palley argue that while oil can be a curse, its effects can be mitigated by wealth distribution schemes. Palley argued that after the fall of the Saddam regime in Iraq, oil revenues be distributed by the US army (Palley, 2003). Such suggestions implicitly support the idea that some oil-rich countries do not possess the institutional structures and political leadership to decide what is in their best interests and that such decisions must be left to 'wiser' foreign - read 'Western' - governments and even to the oil corporations themselves.

Shaxson and Palley, and other proponents of the "oil curse", take a paternalistic and US-centric approach towards resource windfalls in developing countries and in their advocacy of foreign interference in internal affairs and governance. Collier's thinly veiled "International Supply of

Security” or Over-The-Horizon guarantees as he also refers to it, is a similar violation of sovereignty that deals with the political process divorced of the question of resources, but goes even further in suggesting that “...coups need to be harnessed, not eliminated” (Collier 2009, 227). As enchanting as an “oil curse” sounds; it does not befall all developing nations in which a petroleum industry is established, neither are all such nations inherently incapable of managing their own internal affairs, nor is the oil curse something that powerful nations have managed to cure with their own counter-measures.

The research attests to the importance of foreign companies and governments having a solid understanding of the importance of each unique culture they meet in the course of their international business activities and political dealings.

Ross takes up the theme of wealth distribution and conflict in a refinement of the notion of the “oil curse”. He points out “oil and gas revenues seem to magnify the ability of governments to do both good and bad things for their citizens” (Ross 2007, 237). He argues that inequality in vertical distribution (rich and poor individuals) may lead to retarded development and increased poverty, and that the unequal distribution of resources to diverse ethnic and other groups in a country (horizontal distribution) can be harmful and may lead to violent conflict. Ross implies that oil is simply a further means to perpetuate already existing inequalities.

Collier (2009, 26) contends that in countries with low-income levels voters have little knowledge and are unaware of their civil rights, political elites disregarding the plight of the uneducated population. He argues that the low-income level masses thus “retreat into familiar territory”, finding protection within their ethnic group. The manipulation of identity of these disadvantaged people and their shepherding into sub-national institutions in which they find support and protection, whether through ethnicity, tribe or religious affiliation, creates a situation ripe for opportunistic elites to serve their own interests. These elites are able to attract, extract, coerce or even “buy” votes through

patronage politics, organise support through tribal means and group pressure, and often generate tension along pre-established ethnic fault-lines (op.cit, 45). He thus views the nature of the political system, including political mistrust and subnational allegiances, as a paramount factor in the emergence of distorted national development, which may have nothing to do with oil.

Shaxson, on the other hand, emphasises oil rents, rent seeking and the action of domestic political elites as central to the understanding of the deleterious effects of oil revenues, he focuses on the present and pays little attention to historical roots of such actions. Nor does he assign importance to the formal and informal institutions such as tribal affiliation and political lobbies that influence and channel the behaviour of elites within the oil rich states he evaluates, drawing rather tenuous links between the oil curse and global terrorism, as illustrated in the following comment:

West Africa's oil is generating a mix of grievance, instability and great wealth that is not unlike the noxious cocktail that motivated and financed the September 11 2001 hijackers....Oil and gas pay for the intelligence services and armies that keep the boiling anger at arm's length.²⁵²

Lowi provides a less superficial view of the oil curse idea when she emphasises the value of acknowledging differences between countries and the economic and political pressures they face. With specific reference to "oil curse" theories, she explains:

Without factoring agency, cultural peculiarities and historical legacies more systematically into their analysis, earlier studies of the resource curse could not account for some of the very interesting variations among oil exporters in terms of both strategies and performance, nor could they provide compelling explanations for political outcomes.²⁵³

²⁵² Shaxson 2007a, page 4

²⁵³ Lowi 2009, page 37

Speaking in broader terms than the oil curse idea and elaborating on endemic inequalities in societies, glossed over by popular writers, Brown and Stewart (2012, 255-256) draw attention to the fact that both vertical and horizontal inequalities between groups influence the perceived wellbeing of individuals, as well as their ability to participate in the political life of a country. Inequalities manifest themselves in political appointments, voting patterns, government spending, as well as the distribution of public and aid funds. “Horizontal inequalities” are, according to Brown and Stewart (op. cit., 281), strongly correlated with socio-political instability, although they stop short of claiming a direct causal connection. Basedeau contends that such inequalities and the organisation of state power are in fact “...characteristic of poor countries in general” and do not need oil in order to manifest themselves (Basedau 2005, 13).

Lederman and Maloney (2007, 1) argue that natural resources, including petroleum, are neither a curse nor a blessing. They claim that the ability to create institutions that increase a population-wide knowledge base and that engender economic entrepreneurialism, given time, will normally lead to greater societal welfare and to socio-political stability. In other words, there is no “oil curse” *per se* when a seemingly “cursed” situation – which was the case in the Netherlands – is viewed in the context of long-term outcomes and takes into account the changing political and economic circumstances that a country faces and the ways it responds to them.

A contextual approach

Conceptualising the relationship between resource development and political instability, these observations show that in debates around the oil curse, political development and instability, while oil can be a politically destabilising force in a country, this is not always the case. If a short time perspective is taken, it is possible to observe the negative impacts of oil resources on a country’s political and economic institutions but a country can overcome those problems through proper development planning. There is also the question of the order of causation. Some observers assert a direct link

between oil and political instability, with oil as the key cause of such instability. However, this somewhat crude notion of causality fails to embed political change within a wider spatial and historically grounded analytical framework. For example, an important line of inquiry is to compare resource-rich countries with regard to whether they manifest symptoms of the oil curse. Using major oil (and diamond producers) in Sub-Saharan Africa, Basedau (2005) argues that the sum-effect of resource abundance on a state's socio-economic and political development will depend on a number of contextual variables, subject to country-specific as well as resource-specific conditions. These include the type of resource, the level of its abundance, the companies and investors involved and the management of revenues by government. In other words, he supports the importance of the history of a state and of the contextual parameters of its development as in the present study, proposing future research should be better designed and extend the case study approach, and calls for more systematic research. He contends that:

“... future research agenda needs to examine the complex interplay of these contextual variables by adding more sophisticated comparative research designs, especially ‘small and medium N’ comparisons, to the tool box which has been widely confined to the juxtaposition of ‘large N’ and country case studies”.²⁵⁴

In the case of African countries, Caselli (2006) argues that most models that examine the negative impact of natural resources on resource-rich countries are erroneously constructed on variations of the “Dutch Disease” concept. They do not take into account the behaviour of ill-intentioned (or poorly advised) political elites that do not plan and build for the future of their country. He further argues that oil itself does not constitute a “curse”. Rather, the manner in which political elites govern largely determines whether the discovery and production of petroleum turns out to be a positive, negative or a mixed phenomenon for a country. He points out that government decisions in African and other countries are not always transparent, and that researchers

²⁵⁴ Basedeau 2005, page 4

make assumptions, rather than actually do the necessary empirical research, on how a government has made its decisions. He further contends that because governments control revenue inflow, natural resources wealth increases the power of governments and also the risks of how best to use such revenues.

In Caselli's view, government elites thus have three choices. They can maximise the present value of the resources for themselves and their allies, they can invest in the country for the immediate social and economic welfare of their people or they can seek to invest in longer-term development programmes that may not have immediate benefits but promise to do so in the future. Caselli is pointing out the importance of context in understanding what choices are made by elites; which choice (or combination of choices) is exercised is not readily understandable without knowledge of the wider socio-political factors and parameters facing these elites. They do not have the freedom to make decisions with impunity; they are constrained within their socio-political environment with real limits placed on their very existence.

Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003) take a more nuanced view by suggesting that it is the interaction of the discovery and development of oil resources with the major political institutions of a state that need to be considered. In other words, it is the existing political and other institutions within which elites operate, that interact with the petroleum industry. The nature and the course of these complex relationships determine the development and influence of the petroleum industry and in turn, the development path of the host country itself.

Lowi argues that one of the features of states with oil curse problems is that they are already institutionally weak. Signs of this institutional weakness are rent-seeking and misappropriation of government revenues by the elite class in an unstable political landscape, which are seen by them as essential to survival, and thus encouraged in times of general economic stress. Recognition of this political backdrop is vital for researchers who wish to understand how the petroleum industry interacts with, rather than simply acts

upon, a developing country (Lowi 2009, 10-11). Lowi supports the thesis that leaders' choices are paramount in shaping the path that a state takes in its development strategy, at the same time acknowledging the importance of structure and context in shaping agency behaviour within unique socio-political landscapes. She states:

Outcomes turn on leaders' decisions *relative to the particular context they find themselves in*²⁵⁵, the "structured" environment composed of sources, institutions, social systems and social forces.²⁵⁶

Humphreys (2005) also recognises that effects, which might at first seem related solely to the presence of the petroleum industry, may originate in deeper and historically shaped political and economic structures that show themselves through the actions of elites. Humphreys takes the view that the socio-economic metrics used to identify the presence or absence of a "resource curse" may be unreliable measures because they are, in effect, merely a snapshot of decisions made by a small number of elite political actors that are bound by their membership of a specific societal group. These elites act opportunistically in opposition to their traditional opponents by seeking control of actual or anticipated resource revenues. These elites, in essence, are driven by their immediate environment of demanding tribal relations and their political entourages. The broader national interest is neglected in sub-national competition between ethnically defined and institutionalised elites in the course of their struggle for control of the state and its resources.

The fact that political instability and conflict are found in countries without natural resource wealth suggests that such endowment is not a necessary condition for instability and conflict. However, Humphreys suggests that, if natural resources are present, resource grievances are sparked and at times provided with support through six distinct mechanisms that may work in isolation or in combination, dependent on the relationship between country-

²⁵⁵ The researcher's italics

²⁵⁶ Lowi 2009, page 44

specific parameters, outlining these mechanisms and assessing the value of each in selected cases. Three mechanisms are most applicable to the present case and may occur singularly or simultaneously. The first, referred to as the “*greedy rebel mechanism*” is based on the idea that natural resources provide an incentive for like-minded political elites to seize control of the state. The second or “*grievance mechanism*” involves the perceived unjust distribution of natural resource wealth, thus creating inequalities and resulting in grievance-driven civil unrest and socio-political upheaval. While the third, termed the “*greedy outsider mechanism*”, comprises a situation, in which the existence of natural resources may be an incentive for a third party to foster civil unrest as a means to gaining access to the resources.

Humphrey’s mechanisms suggest that political elites operate within particular sets of conditions not of their own making, Lowi arguing a similar point when she says that political leaders should be regarded as actors constrained by the stage on which they are acting:

Actors that choose from among alternative possible responses to a set of conditions they face: *conditions that provide a structure and impose constraints*²⁵⁷. In responding as they do, actors contribute to fashioning the outcome that eventually results.²⁵⁸

Lowi’s emphasis here is upon leaders as contributors within complex political and social environments. In her view, leaders cannot be regarded either as omnipotent reality-makers or as pawns of more powerful interests.

Foreign interference and domestic politics

Less has been written about the political factors involved in “the greedy outsiders mechanism” (Humphreys 2005, 511) or more generally to foreign influence in the resource curse literature. More specifically, there has been limited discussion of the political role of foreign industry participants in a

²⁵⁷ The researcher’s italics

²⁵⁸ Lowi 2009, page 40

country's political process from within the resources curse debate. While important contributions have been made by Sachs and Stiglitz (2007) and Lederman and Maloney (2007), their emphasis has been predominantly economic. They have analysed economic trends such as in currency appreciation, fluctuations in commodity prices and the like, neglecting the factors of international relations, foreign and national political institutions, their history, their interactions and interrelationships, as well as the effect of agency in the actions and non-actions of political elites of influence.

Yates (2012, 7), like Humphreys, argues that the unequal distribution of resource revenues that generate grievances may lead belligerent parties to seek external assistance. He refers to the example of former South Sudanese rebel, John Garang, and argues that a foreign third party, oil company or government from a developed oil-consuming state, may not be receptive to genuine grievances in a belligerent such as Garang. Yates takes a different tack to foreign interference and claims that a foreign third party may be likely to advocate for a return to peace rather than justice, very likely promoting and/or prolonging social, economic and political injustices and the ensuing instability. In other words, the outsider may be less concerned with a just settlement of a country's domestic conflict than ensuring the momentary cessation of hostilities, promoting peace-building measures or the use of diplomacy to provide opportunity for the outsider's own immediate objectives. Advocating an "outsider" concept, Yates' approach touches on the interference by foreign powers through non-involvement in the conflicts experienced by underdeveloped, oil-producing countries.

Karl's argues in a similar manner, in stating that petroleum:

...turns oil states into honey-pots – ones to be raided by all actors, foreign and domestic regardless of the long-term consequences produced by this collective [domestic and foreign] rent seeking.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Karl 2007, page 257

Maass, in his more recent populist treatise on the oil “curse” entitled “Crude World” (2009) apportions most blame to coercive domestic elites in oil-rich countries, but concedes there are many factors that shape a country’s oil development:

I was flummoxed by the differing fates of countries that lived off oil. In one, there was invasion. In another [there was] poverty. Nearby, [there was] fundamentalism. Not far away, [there was] empire. Across the world, [there was] pollution. In the distance [there was] anarchy. Over the border, [there was] civil war.²⁶⁰

Maass goes further, however, and opens an important line of inquiry regarding foreign stakeholders’ involvement when he describes American activity in Baghdad on April 9 2003, the same day Saddam Hussein’s statue was toppled in Baghdad’s Firdos Square:

There was an oasis amid this anarchy. American soldiers had piled sandbags around the Ministry of Oil and were patrolling its perimeter... protecting little else.²⁶¹

Humphreys refers to two examples that highlight the interplay between foreign interference and domestic elites (2005, 509-511). In the case of the Republic of Congo, where the former French parastatal oil company, Elf, had been operating for many years, Humphreys argues that the company carried out covert and coercive actions with the knowledge of the French government. These actions led to the escalation of conflict between troops loyal to Denis Sassou Nguesso and those led by the incumbent President Pascal Lissouba. Humphreys also refers to the role of political intrigues in Chad as the US and France carried out covert political activities that contributed to renewed and extensive civil unrest and to presidential overthrows beginning with the discovery of oil in Chad in the early 1970s. Hissène Habré, strongly pro-West and seen as a force to contain Libya’s Gadhafi, received the military and

²⁶⁰ Maass 2009, page 6

²⁶¹ Op.cit, page 8

financial backing of France and the US in successfully chasing Colonel Gadhafi's forces out of newly oil-rich Chad. Sanctioned and supported by both the US and France, Habré's overthrow of President Goukouni Oueddei in June 1982 did to some extent settle a country that was politically unstable and whose regime was a deterrent to investment. However, it also brought in a corrupt and violent dictatorship that relied on death squads and the killing of some 20,000 to maintain control until his overthrow in 1990 (Meredith 2005, 356).

Humphreys (2005) commenting on Chad and the Republic of Congo, concludes that regime breakdown often occurs in cases of socio-politically unstable resource-rich states, precisely because of the involvement of self-interested outsiders. He foreshadows the later work of Karl and Lowi on foreign intervention as a significant component in the development of social and political unrest and upheavals in resource-rich states. Lowi goes further than suggesting that foreign interference interacts with domestic forces to generate instability. She points out, that concentrating on the mismanagement of factor endowments to explain African state failures can divert attention away from an understanding of the ways in which domestic political and institutional processes themselves shape political and business elites' behaviour (Lowi 2009, 33). These comments suggest that both domestic and international political and economic processes play singular, parallel and combined roles in the exploitation of a country's sovereign resources and the degree of political stability under which they are developed.

Resources and international politics

A wider negative political effect suggested to arise from petroleum abundance and petro-wealth, is international conflict. This can be the result of belligerent petro-aggression on the part of some oil-rich states as put forward by Colgan (2013), arguing that some 'petrostates' can and do initiate international conflicts, or the development of 'resource wars' in an international environment in which resources are perceived to be finite and diminishing (Yergin, 1991).

With regard to petro-aggression, Colgan, using Iraq, Libya, Iran, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia as case examples, states that developing nations with relatively recently realised petroleum endowments, “show a remarkable propensity for instigating international conflict” (2013, Kindle loc. 530). However, such actions are not confined to petro-states and he exaggerates the power of developing countries to cause external conflict, while neglecting that many of these conflicts are prompted and often driven by the developed world. In his case studies, Colgan omits to include the United States for example, itself a developed oil-rich country that has matured beyond total resource-dependence, as the external influence if not the external aggressor, the actions of the US compounding the original internal unrest of several of these developing petro-states. This adds to Humphreys’ argument that interested foreign actors and “greedy outsiders” could be regarded as “one and the same” in that they influence the socio-political outcomes of oil-rich developing countries, whether the interest is in maintaining geopolitical relationships, ensuring resource supplies or maintaining regional strategic balance of power.

Lowi (2009, 41), argues in her work on energy politics in Algeria that foreign interference can play a role in the political instability of a country. She points to three conditions acting in combination that lead to political instability and often result in regime breakdown. The first of these conditions is a distinct lack of cohesion between the personal objectives of state elites, the aims of state institutions and the needs and wants of the general population. This usually comes about because the state has failed to provide basic or promised services and investments for its citizens’ wellbeing. The second condition is that opposition elites withdraw their support for state leaders, as criticism increases over the real or perceived unfair distribution of rents, often resulting from failure in the first condition. The third condition is that these same dissatisfied elites mobilise internal support from aggrieved factions of the population. Most importantly in the context of the present discussion on the ill effects of petroleum, support is sometimes mobilised externally from foreign powers ready to help their cause. Moreover, the motives for foreign

power support vary and these may be linked directly to continuing access to valued resources as well as to their wider geopolitical concerns.

Karl (2007) likewise contends that the resource “curse” is primarily a political-economic phenomenon. She argues that the discovery of petroleum and the associated increase in value of the developing country’s assets precipitates unusually high levels of external interest and potential interference. In some cases, such as those already mentioned by Humphreys as well as more recent events in Iraq, actual political interference by foreign private interests and interested developed nations is potentially aimed at maintaining a significant major interest in, or complete control of, the petroleum resources of a country. It has to be said, however, that Humphreys is very cautious in identifying any actual intentions or potentially desired impact of the international actors in the cases he examines (Humphreys 2005, 533).

Until scholars such as Humphreys and Collier began to bring into focus the effects of the international socio-political context and of international relations on the political stability of petro-states, there was low scholarly interest in their importance. This can be explained by the emphasis that early researchers placed purely on economics in studying the effect of petroleum on a country’s development (Rodriquez and Sachs 1999, Sachs and Warner 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001). This early focus on economics is also addressed by Karl, emphasising that resource-rich Western nations such as the Netherlands, UK, Norway, Sweden, USA and Australia for example, grew through the development of their natural sub-soil resources in an environment generally free of detrimental socio-political pressures. On the other hand, she points out those oil producers in Africa such as Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola and Sudan, were only beginning to establish themselves as nations in the late-1970s and 1980s as they attempted to begin as petroleum-exporting states. That period was a time of restricted global economic activity and trade, resulting from tight US monetary policies. These policies had been introduced by the Federal Reserve in order to battle US inflation, irrespective of consequences to the global economy. As a result, the resource-rich countries

of Africa experienced dramatic drops in the price of their natural resources exports, sharp rises in export competition, as well as increases in the cost of borrowing and debt servicing (Bates 2010, 69-70). This global situation thus reflected on the internal situation and brought on hardships and socio-political competition for survival and for control and distribution of needed resources within the increasingly impoverished population of the resource-rich states.

Le Billon (2005, 21-27) argues for a direct link between the health of the internal politics of an oil-rich state and the nature of its external influences. He suggests that conflict can occur at any stage of the development of a project, whenever a segment of the population considers itself to be at risk of missing potential advantages or losing existing advantages. Therefore, Le Billon contends that a section of the population must be aggrieved in order for outside influence to occur, having a reason or excuse to intervene on their behalf, using many examples from Papua New Guinea to the former Zaire. The outside influence is often the ex-colonial power waiting for an excuse to intervene, intent on gaining economic and political advantage out of the developing nation's unhealthy internal state of affairs.

Causality

As the present research findings indicate, Le Billon, Basedau and others, repeatedly point to the profound influence of contextual and pre-existing internal and external conditions in determining whether natural resources will be detrimental or beneficial to a country's socio-economic and political development. In the case of Mauritania, the historical and socio-political context of the country that preceded the arrival of the petroleum industry played a major role in shaping the country's subsequent development in the post-colonial period.

Basedeau proposed that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a "resource curse" (2005). While Le Billon borrowed the words of an Angolan journalist in order to reinforce his argument that political forces have greater weight than

resource abundance in determining whether a ‘windfall’ resource becomes a curse:

It is fashionable to say that we are cursed by our mineral riches. That is not true. We are cursed by our leaders.²⁶²

With the many circulating assumptions about political instability and natural resource causality, Clarke’s perspective is that it is important to evaluate the political and other mechanisms through which any purported “curse” may work and to base conclusions as to the existence of a “curse” on relevant empirical evidence. Clarke points out there are many cases of misidentified causality and that analyses that discount endogenous drivers behind socio-economic and political changes, run the risk of blaming oil for all social, economic ills and political instability of an oil-rich country:

The flaws of the most sophisticated curse theories have been further exposed in research by World Bank economists on Equatorial Guinea (often claimed to be a *cause célèbre* for evidence of accentuated malady). These studies concluded that pre-existent conditions were critical to any presence of the oil curse: in the case of Equatorial Guinea, its overall industry stood at <1% of GDP - hardly a candidate for deindustrialisation. There, it was found that the oil industry had fuelled structural transformation, income per head grew fast, added capacity emerged as oil value chain grew, net savings and investment expanded, state revenues and exports enlarged and capital formation improved, as did the technology coefficient in the economy. Meanwhile, poverty was eroded and oil development created huge potential for further poverty alleviation. Conclusion: the oil resource endowment and industry presence with the growth were an economic blessing.²⁶³

However, Clarke also states, “Corruption remains...Anxiety remains about the management of the oil industry by political elites, [as well as] issues which surround presidents, families, ministers, [and] clans”²⁶⁴. Like Basedau, Clarke

²⁶² Le Billion 2005, page 8

²⁶³ Clarke, from the epilogue to the second 2010 edition, page 592

²⁶⁴ Personal communication, July 2013

argues that it is rare for the political issues of a country to be connected directly to the industry's action, or of its corporate players.

Summary

Focusing on political instability at the elite level, the key point made in this chapter in evaluating the causal link between resource endowment and political instability of a resource-rich state is that a purely economic approach as in the early proponents of the “oil curse” is an inappropriate stance to adopt in the light of emerging evidence. Socio-political conditions have influence on resource development, but these conditions are also influenced by such developments. In spite of agency decision being taken by individual political elites, these decisions are guided ‘invisibly’ within the context of complicated socio-political structures that often have centuries-long histories and have developed their own particular institutional requirements and limits. Despite an apparent freedom of choice, elite power in the face of an emergent petroleum industry and its promises does not necessarily result in unbridled political warfare over wealth, or the promise of wealth.

The debates around the oil curse, political development and instability demonstrate that it is not always the case that oil discovery and development is a politically destabilising force. If a short time perspective is taken, negative impacts of oil can be conceived, but a longer-term view of development in a resource-rich country, a petro-state, may demonstrate that problems can be overcome through appropriate development planning. The fact that political instability and conflict are found in countries without natural resource wealth suggests that such endowment is not a necessary condition for such instability and conflict.

Lastly, the discussion centres on the role played by foreign participants in a country's political process, and the interplay between foreign interference and domestic elites is examined. The approach stresses that unequal distribution of economic apportioning of resource revenues, and the resulting conflict over the appropriation of these, may lead to a call for foreign assistance by

belligerent parties. Taking a different perspective, Humphreys' argument is that interested foreign actors and "greedy outsiders" could thus be regarded as "one and the same", their interest being the maintenance of stable geopolitical relationships, the assurance of resource supplies for themselves or merely tipping regional strategic balance of power to their advantage.

This chapter has shown that an immediate causal link made between natural resource endowment and socio-political instability is an error committed by many academics as well as non-academics. In the light of the above discussion, the next chapter looks more closely at the place of oil in the political development of Mauritania between 2001 and 2011 and the role it may have played in the country's political instability over that period.

Chapter 6 – Mauritania and the “Oil Curse”

The central argument of this chapter is that while the discovery and start-up of the petroleum sector played some role in the political events and developments in the 2001 to 2011 period, they were the outcome of a complex interplay of a number of contextual variables. These variables include individual elites, leadership styles, ideologies, cultural interplays, formal and informal institutions and Mauritania's historical and contemporary geopolitical relations with other regional states and its former colonial master, France.

Oil discovery and its potential development played some role in the political instability of the period but its importance should not be over-emphasised. Reviewing Mauritania's political development prior to oil, political and social instability was primarily caused by an enduring and endemic search for the control of revenues and rent by various Bidân descent groups. However, the failure of oil to flow in significant quantities at Chinguetti from early 2007 and thus for important revenues to be generated, did nevertheless contributed to political changes at that time. It did so in ways different to what some versions of the oil curse hypotheses put forward. It was the failure of the industry to deliver that affected government and political elite behaviour rather than windfall revenues. This behaviour, however, was rooted in Mauritania's history and the socio-political institutions that had grown up over many decades, even centuries and channelled through the institutional structure of the modern state. Paramount among these behavioural traits was the endemic search for hegemonic power among competing Bidân descent groups.

The chapter seeks to show that mono-causal explanations found in some versions of the oil curse hypothesis are too simple to capture the socio-political complexities of Mauritanian society. Most specifically, the research challenges Forster's notion that the oil curse descended on Mauritania, as

suggested in his general observation of the consequences of oil for a society's development. He states:

The oil curse was a double-edged sword that eventually wounded rulers as well as the ruled. Increased state revenues fed the networks of corruption and patronage, while leading to growing public demands for a stake in the wealth that could not be met....²⁶⁵

Foster's specific observation suggests that revenues, which to present have proven to be ephemeral, had not reached the wider population and that this population, and especially the underprivileged Afro-Mauritanians and Haratin, had begun to be aware of its importance and were demanding a greater stake.

Traditional and historical roots

Political instability in Mauritania in the modern era should be assessed with an eye to its pre-colonial character and the environment and events that characterise the "proto-modern" sovereign state established in 1960. As previously discussed, Mauritania has a history of Maure domination. In Mauritania between 2003 and 2011, frustrated Bidân tribes staged "palace" coup d'états, and it was obvious to all that the Mauritanian state was unable to control wider civil unrest and violence.

Prior to French colonial rule, in the region that became known as Mauritania, the population was subjugated through the dominant Bedouin structure of the Arab-Berber tribes. With French colonial rule, this tribal structure developed into a tributary-like distributary system that was embedded within the new sovereign state model. When the French departed, a Bidân-dominated regime remained in place and exhibited characteristics similar to pre-colonial patrimonial clientelism. In Mauritania, Maures continue to live sedentary existences under a modernised Bedouin system, which remains part of their cultural landscape, even if it is denied or unacknowledged by some Western

²⁶⁵ Foster 2011, page 88

observers (Bellow 2003, 5). As an example, in the past, *razzias*, or raids, had been carried out by the nomadic Bidân tribes on each other, as well as on the sedentary Black communities of the Senegal River valley. Aspects of the behavioural pattern of *razzia* continue in the modern context but in the form of rent seeking, embezzlement and at times more fraudulent behaviour by strongly positioned Bidân state elites and members of their entourage. Such blurring of the distinction between private and public spheres of activity is common in Mauritania where resources are distributed through both *bone fide* government activities and through embezzlement and privileged acquisition of rents. It should be noted that Mauritania ranks 119th out of 177 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Index for 2013 (<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/country#MRT>), political corruption being just one of the parameters monitored. The index also takes into its calculation the private interests of political elites that influence public policies, and it attempts to measure the transparency and accountability that these leaders and the government that they control have towards the population they govern.

The manner of distribution of resources adopted by the Mauritanian political elites, principally Bidân, has created a wide gap between rich and poor and a divide between privileged and underprivileged groups. The UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for 2007 shows that almost 62% of the population at the time of the survey, lived in multi-dimensional poverty, including very poor levels of education, health and standard of living (UNDP Human Development Report, 2013). The divide is largely between Bidân tribes, on the one hand, and between Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians on the other, although there do exist economic and other inequalities within each of these groupings.

When it became known that there were potential windfall revenues from the foreign petroleum industry's activities in Mauritania, these inequalities were perceived by the lesser privileged and underprivileged to have worsened. Frustration and grievances were thus generated in disadvantaged individuals

in an environment of relative scarcity and conflict ensued with the mobilisation of previously silenced social forces, a situation comparable to that of oil-rich, pre-civil war Algeria of the 1980s (Lowi 2009, xiii).

Coup after coup

Coup d'états and government upheavals of various sorts had been part of the Mauritanian political landscape for many decades before the discovery of petroleum in 2001, and it is important to recap, the manner in which past presidents were chosen and relieved of their duties since independence.

Ould Daddah had strained his country's resources, brought the national army into disrepute and had nationalised French iron ore assets at a time this commodity was a significant lever in Mauritania's relations with Europe. His overthrow was due to internal dissatisfaction among the ruling elites, but the ex-colonial power, France, is certainly believed by the majority of educated and uneducated Mauriticians to have played a major part in his removal.

While the 1978 overthrow of Ould Daddah was aided by the French, it was precipitated by a need for Mauritania to extricate itself from the Western Sahara war. However, the two palace coups that ousted Ould Saleck and Ould Louly were driven largely by deep inter-tribal differences. These differences reflected the contrast of the ideas and customs, but also of the needs and wants, between warrior tribes from the north and east, and maraboutic tribes from the southwest. It is thus timely to recount Foster's words to understand the mechanisms and objectives that formulated in the minds of these leaders:

The state, an alien, adversarial entity constituted the most appetising prize, prompting tribes to compete over hijacking it and pillaging its resources for internal allotment... the pretext of Assabiya [however] did not occur in the framework of a benevolent tribal welfare state... As soon as a tribe allied sufficient forces to take over a wing of the government, it disintegrated in internal strife over its spoils, only to be taken over by another tribe with stronger internal cohesion... in a

cyclical mechanism of hostile takeovers termed predatory redistribution, redirecting national wealth to a handful of tribes.²⁶⁶

The overthrow of Ould Haidallah in 1984 was precipitated through France's intervention in order to counter the strong pro-Arab leanings increasingly demonstrated during his reign. It brought in Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya to rule as President for 21 years until 3 August 2005, a rule marked by major socio-political upheavals, as well as political fraud, widespread embezzlement, corruption by the dominant Bidân tribal groups and continued ethnic dominance and exploitation of the Haratin and Afro-Mauritanian segments of the population.

Did oil play a part in the continued occurrence of coups?

It is only towards the end of the reign of an increasingly autocratic and patrimonial President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya that the oil industry began to emerge as a potential prize for the ruling elites and their modern-day tributaries.

The failed coup of 2003 against Taya was fuelled by traditional rivalries between warrior and maraboutic Bidân tribes, and was sparked by ex-Major Saleh Ould Hanenna's personal resentment. It shook Taya but did not dislodge him. His close associates, Ely Mohamed Vall and Mohamed Abdel Aziz, however, saw the signs of a failing, long-enduring autocrat. Perhaps bolstered by, but certainly not solely motivated by the promise of oil revenues, Vall and Aziz resolved to ensure their continuity at the helm of power and abrogate any opportunity for adverse judgements concerning past crimes or embarrassing revelations of possible involvement in the "economic fiction" perpetrated by the Taya regime (Samuel 2011, 13).

Bidân-Moroccan political analyst, part-time lecturer at the University of Nouakchott and Nouakchott journalist Mohamed Fouad Ould Barrada comments on the August 2005 overthrow of President Taya and the possibility

²⁶⁶ Foster 2011, page 32 - 33

of a link with the nascent oil industry. He especially points out the continuity of the elite entourage around the president, but leaves the question hanging as to the significance and the implications of this situation:

It indeed was a coup d'état.... As a researcher and a journalist, I think there may have been a link between the arrivals of oil in the state in 2005 and the coup.

There was an issue with oil arriving, this is what is often said. However, I cannot confirm it 100%.... I am just saying that there could have been a link between the coup and the discovery of oil, but it cannot be ascertained, as at the same time there was a build-up of anger and frustration in Mauritania.... As a journalist and analyst, I cannot confirm it. Indeed, I cannot confirm it... We are not able to consider uncertainties with this socio-political phenomenon... It must be inserted in its historic setting. There was a build-up of frustration in the population, there was anger and there were other problems. This was a power, you realise, that had lasted more than 20 years!

I realised that in 2005. With Ely Mohamed Vall, it was in the same system – same people and same government as with Taya.

In my view, he upheld his cousin [Abdel Aziz and joined the coup perpetrators] to avoid the settling of old scores [by the Afro-Mauritanians that he mistreated in the course of the 1989-1991 ethnic upheaval] in the event that anyone else took the reins of the country.

In the end, maybe he had not wanted to share [the spoils of government] with any others!²⁶⁷ Is it not General Abdel Aziz, his cousin, who carried out the “palace coup” of 2008?

I am saying that the change was, “a door that opened and a door that closed”. Because it is the same people [that surrounded President Taya, were subsequently with Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall and] that are now “around” General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz...

Yes it is the same, the same, the same people, but why?

²⁶⁷ Soon after the coup d'état of August 2005, many elites in Nouakchott accused Ely Mohamed Vall of pursuing his own interests, working to “enrich himself by taking over the mobile license from Chinguitel and renegotiating the oil contracts” (Samuel 2013, 15)

There were other coups in the past, other attempted coup d'états, and well before the discovery of oil! ²⁶⁸

The coup that ousted President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya on 3 August 2005 brought Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall to power, shadowed by his cousin then-Colonel Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. This period saw some positive socio-economic advances with the formation of a Petroleum Fund for future generations, as well as a signature of adherence to the Extractive Industries Transparency Index (EITI). Such moves helped to counterbalance claims made by dissidents in Mauritania, and some in the international community, of continuing fraud and embezzlement on the part of the ruling class during that period.

The negative relations that the Junta developed with the petroleum industry as a result of the “Woodside Affair” and the growing dissatisfaction that Arabisation moves engendered in the general population, were, however, also characteristic of this period of “transitional rule”.

The civilian elections of 11 March 2007 brought in Sidi Sheikh Ould Abdallahi, a seemingly weak puppet-president, but who was not as pliant as anticipated. In an environment of a troubled economy due to the failed materialisation of the anticipated post-2006 petroleum bonanza, added to which was the increasing pressures he was under to conform to the will of the military, the president fired several members of the army elites on 6 August 2008, precipitating a coup which brought back military rule.

Gaye Silly Soumaré sees no direct connection between oil and the coup, arguing that it was a grab for power. However, he also suggests that, in a reversal of an oil curse thesis, the lack of an expected oil bonanza contributed to a weakening of Abdallahi's presidency:

²⁶⁸ Interview 27A with Mohamed Fouad Ould Barrada, 19 April 2011

Because the government lacked funds, Abdallahi cut salaries to government [employees and officials] and he dismissed military men from the government.... Money, meant to have flowed in from the production of 75,000 barrels per day, was missing [because flow rates had fallen at Chinguetti due to unforeseen technical problems].... By the time of Abdallahi's presidency, it had fallen to less than 3,000 barrels per day.... This was nothing compared to what had been promised and what was expected.... Was the second overthrow of a civilian government [in 2008] due to the absence of oil? People did not talk about or mention oil.

There is the fact that there was a General [Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz] who wanted total power and control... He “stood up” against the President [and overthrew him].²⁶⁹

If the lack of oil revenues did contribute to political changes at that time, it could be argued with Gaye Silly Soumaré, that it did so in ways different to some versions of the oil curse. In the case of the fall of the Abdallahi regime, rather than a surfeit of revenues and an intensified scramble by governing elites and their opponents for those revenues, it was the failure of the oil industry to deliver which affected government's ability to function. It deflated the ruling elite's expectations of enhanced government largesse and enhanced these elites' grievances and resentments, sharpening the rift between warriors and marabouts. In casually discussing the continuing regime of President Abdel Aziz with the researcher at an international convention in 2011, a highly placed, educated and well-travelled kinsman of the President, made the 'politically incorrect remark' directed at the Marabout tribes from the southwest of the country:

“Ces marchands, ces commerçants! On les a renversés, nous les guerriers! Ils ne sont plus rien, ces marchands ! Nous sommes les plus forts!”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Interview 11A with Gaye Silly Soumaré, 7 April 2011

²⁷⁰ “These traders, these shopkeepers! We overthrew them, us warriors! They are nothing now these traders! We are the strongest!”

The 18 July 2009 constitutional coup, for which General Abdel Aziz removed his uniform and replaced it with “suit and tie”, brought back a military man in civilian clothes through legitimate elections. Why did Abdel Aziz finally make this long-expected move for the presidency using all the manipulative and coercive power at his disposal via the powerful military machine? It was not a question of the failing petroleum industry or even its dwindling revenues stream. The fulfilment of personal ambitions was a real factor but depended upon the support of the Oualad Bousbaa tribe that sought to retain their power supremacy and business control.

During the resurgence of relative economic scarcity with the sharp and unexpected 2007 downturn of petroleum revenues, Abdel Aziz sought to maintain political and social stability and hold off serious political mobilisations by marginalised Bidân, Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians who expected improved economic circumstances. He did this through an effective use of largesse in distributing everyday necessities and other favours. This was done through intelligent political manoeuvring and maintenance of the distributary regime that supported the Oualad Bousbaa, Smacides and Idawali at the top of the hierarchical tribal order. For example, President Aziz emphasising his care for the common people, mediated his insistence on punishment for corrupt practices within the government being at the top of his agenda (US Department of State 2012, 27). Indeed, the law does provide criminal penalties for official corruption. However, the authorities seldom enforce such laws effectively as those in authoritative positions and doing the investigating are often related by tribal ties to those members of the powerful elites being investigated (op. cit, 25). Abdel Aziz’s moves to appeal to the masses were balanced by ensuring that his tribal relatives and collaborators were kept in high positions, keeping a tight rein on those who rule, but closing his eyes to what he considered small “*dérappages*”.

The prospect of an oil bonanza led the dominant Bidân groups to tighten their grip on power by distancing themselves from smaller and less powerful tribal segments. However, this had the effect of increasing resentment among these

disfavoured Bidân tribes, and intensified the grievances among the other excluded communities of Afro-Mauritanians and Haratins.

It must be noted, however, that “voracious” and “exclusionist” behaviours displayed in modern times and exemplified in what Samuel calls “financial anarchy and “economic fiction” (Samuel 2001, 9), have always been present in this economically and politically Maure-dominated region. As a high-level political elite and Bidân minister from Taya’s government pointed out in an anonymous interview, personal economic concerns were not the main factors that influenced the political upheavals prior to 2005. Rather, these upheavals were a result of intra-Bidân tribal struggles over which tribal segments would politically dominate the wider Mauritanian polity. However, it is important to note that obtaining political power gave the dominant tribal segments access to economic resources and the means to distribute them.

Although lying outside the main period covered in this study, inter-Bidân struggles for power and control of the state apparatus continue to this day. For example, Isselmou Abdelkader, minister in the time of President Taya and long-time public servant since the mid-1970s, argues in the passage below that both inter-tribal rivalries and efforts to control the economic wealth of the country remain defining features of the political system in Mauritania.

Beforehand, there were no economic interests in any of the coups.... Today [2011], there is an economic aspect that must be taken into consideration.... He who controls the state, controls the petroleum revenues from Chinguetti, the iron ore mine of Zouérat, the gold mine of Tasiast and the copper mine of Akjoujt.... Whoever carries out a coup today also has in mind the economic gains [that can be made] but must also have in mind intertribal links, interregional and economic links, as well as ethnic issues.... Those that carried out the coup against Ould Daddah [in 1978], did not think of the SNIM [iron ore mine] at the time. It was not important to them at all! ²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Interview 48A with Isselmou Abdelkader, 1 January 2012

Dr Niang, a Peulh entrepreneur exiled in France since the 1989 upheavals, summarises the situation and implies that economic issues did to some extent shape the pre-oil politics of the competing Bidân groups. He points out that the Bidân elites did not confine their activities to the political sphere, but branched out into business as the economic circumstances of the country changed. He stops short of attributing successive coups to oil, but sees it as a facilitating condition or catalyst:

The Maures all became ship owners when they discovered that there was big money to be made in fish. With oil, it is the same; they “all” became oilmen. To answer your question, even if the enormous oil revenues [coming to the state] are not the principal goal of the coups that have recently occurred, they are a decisive catalyst²⁷². The huge financial stakes created in a very short space of time between 2005 and 2010 are enormous and up for grabs and the Bidân are watching [each other]...²⁷³

Increasingly, there are public media accusations related to the president’s own tribe growing control of key government revenue sources, with the criticism that President Abdel Aziz was central in the three successful coups of 2005, 2008 and 2009. For example, in March 2013, the online Mauritanian website, “Le Quotidien de Nouakchott” reported that the Council of Ministers had approved several new PSCs for Tullow Oil, the dominant foreign company in a much-awaited renewal of interest in Mauritania. Prominently noted was that the Tullow country representative, Kemal Ould Mouhamedou, is the cousin of the President (*Le Quotidien*, 21 March 2013). The French-based mining and petroleum industry analysts of “Africa Intelligence” likewise denounced the president’s entourage on their blog, “Insiders Mining” (2013):

Since President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz came to power [as a civilian President] in 2009, a number of members of his Oualad Bousbaa tribe have obtained key posts in the Mauritanian

²⁷² The enormity of the downturn in oil production from Chinguetti and therefore of oil revenues to the government, had not yet been realised by the general public

²⁷³ Interview 19A with Souleymane Niang, 14 April 2011

administration. Ahmed Salem Ould Tekroul [President Abdel Aziz's nephew] formerly of Société Mauritanienne des Hydrocarbures (SMH)...has been promoted head of hydrocarbons at the Ministry of Petroleum, Energy and Mining. There was a similar promotion in 2010 in the private sector for Melanine Ould Towmy, an Oualad Bousbaa who became head of external relations at Kinross, operator of the giant Tasiast gold mine, near the southern border of Western Sahara. Finally, Kemal Ould Mouhamedou, a cousin of President Abdel, has become the state representative at Tullow Oil, the company developing the Banda gas field.²⁷⁴

Another comment from the Paris-based industry media group, Africa Intelligence, refers to dominant Bidân families seeking greater control over mining contracts:

At the same time, numerous sub-contracts have been switched from companies, owned by members of the Smacides tribe of former president Maaouya Ould Taya, to Oualad Bousbaa entrepreneurs like the Azizi family. As a result, businessmen deprived of mining service contracts denounce the apparently unstoppable rise to prominence of figures close to the president.²⁷⁵

These comments made in a widely circulated industry magazine suggest that the possibility of substantial future oil revenues is generating a scramble for positions of power. Thus, oil and other natural resources are likely to play a greater role in future domestic political development. However, no matter how close that relationship may become, it must be understood within the political and economic context of the development of Mauritanian society and its place within the political economy of regional and international relations. Central to that understanding remain the inter-tribal struggles that have pitted Bidân against Bidân elites for decades if not centuries, the transformation of Bidân cultural and material life over the past fifty years, especially the rapid urbanisation of the Bidân as a result of drought conditions in the 1960s and

²⁷⁴ *Insiders Mining* 2013

²⁷⁵ "Insider's Mining: Decision-makers business circles"; article created 4 February 2013 (www.africaintelligence.com/insiders/AMA/Mauritania/2013/02/04/mauritania--ouald--bou--sbaas--deep--into--mining/) accessed 6 February 2013

1970s, the continuing economic and political tensions between the Bidân and settled black populations in the south of the country, and the changing role of Mauritania within the global economy.

In the post-Taya period from 2005, petroleum has come to play a larger role in the elite politics of the country. These developments continue to unfold and the next section looks briefly at their main features.

Geopolitics and Mauritanian oil: Post 2005

The conflicts of 2003 and 2005 and the accompanying socio-economic instability caused by the palace coups of 2008 and 2009 damaged the international reputation of Mauritania. Beginning with the first successful coup in 2005, and the acrimonious relations between the Mauritanian government and Woodside, most small and larger companies departed the Taoudeni Basin and many stopped their operations in the coastal basin. However, because of Europe's dependence on imported oil and gas, Mauritania continued to play a role in Europe's geostrategic planning. In 2006, Gaz de France (GDF-Suez) announced an agreement with the then-Junta government of Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall to study the feasibility of a Liquid Natural Gas or LNG facility in Mauritania. Following the opening up of the gas-prone Taoudeni Basin in eastern Mauritania in 2006, several private and parastatal energy suppliers from Europe joined the rush to acquire permits. The companies included the German Wintershall and RWE, the Spanish Repsol, and the French company Total.

The security of retaining several permits in Mauritania's portion of the Taoudeni Basin by Total was bolstered by the successful military intervention of French troops in Mali from January 2013 in the reaffirmation of its involvement in security concerns in its Sahalian ex-colonies (Fessy, 2013). This could be regarded as a situation whereby France is reiterating its quasi-territorial rights, retaining West Africa as its "*chasse gardée*"²⁷⁶. In early

²⁷⁶ Private hunting ground

2013, the Irish company Tullow Oil, guided by the President's cousin, became interested in bringing the offshore Banda gas discovery to commercial production by 2016. This development-regenerated interest in Mauritania, but the project remains conditional on many factors, both commercial and political²⁷⁷ and recent press reports express disappointment with progress to date. Total has likewise recently increased its involvement in Mauritania and, following President Abdel Aziz's "forced medical evacuation" to Paris in late 2012, the company has acquired deep offshore permits close to Tullow's, as has the American company, Kosmos Energy. The increased interest in Mauritania by sovereign foreign powers through involvement in the oil business is confirmed by several participants:

You have witnessed how quickly the French recognised Aziz! Legitimising someone who has carried out a coup d'état! It is because they have interests here in the country. They have interest in our petroleum and our gas! Have you noticed how quickly and in what strength Total came back with the ascension of Abdel Aziz to power?²⁷⁸

With the arrival to power of Abdel Aziz, it is Total that makes its appearance....It is Total!²⁷⁹

Of course, of course there is a link [between political instability] and petroleum discovery! Nevertheless, it is also most certainly linked to the geostrategic interests of France and that of the USA.²⁸⁰

Despite recent ventures entered into by Total in several countries of eastern Africa, the French government objective of maintaining its significant role in the affairs of its ex-colonies in Francophone Africa, is based on its requirements as a dominant but energy-dependent state to secure its geostrategic interest in oil and gas supplies and its access to essential natural

²⁷⁷ Tim O'Hanlon, Vice-President - African Business, Tullow Oil, personal communication, October 30, 2012

²⁷⁸ Interview 07A with Ly Ciré, 6 April 2011

²⁷⁹ Interview 32A with Mohamed Fall Ould Bah, 12 December 2011

²⁸⁰ Interview 45A with Mohamed Ould Elabed, 26 December 2011

resources. The recent upheavals in Mauritania have been overtly used by the French government to maintain its political influence in the affairs of the region. Mauritania is a state that France sees as integral in achieving the strategic national objective of supplying natural resources “to the homeland”, and political instability in Mauritania caused by its newly discovered oil potential could threaten France’s own energy requirements.

The Mauritanian public and the higher political elites involved in the opposition, as well as many in government, question the relationship that has developed between French authorities and President Abdel Aziz. They question the French authorities’ motives in retaining the purportedly convalescing President Mohamed (Ould) Abdel Aziz in Paris, incommunicado for over a month after allegedly being shot by an over eager soldier on 3 October 2012 (“Mauritanie: mais où est passé Aziz?” 2012). His lack of communication, verbal, visual or otherwise through official intermediaries with Mauritania during his six weeks convalescence in Paris raised many questions, including that of France’s possible involvement in a foiled assassination attempt and Abdel Aziz’s subsequent docile regaining of a position within an African pantheon of authoritarian rulers under France’s control (Abdeljelil, 2013).

Conclusion

Claims made by some proponents of the oil curse hypothesis that a county’s anticipated and actual dependence on its natural resources inevitably leads to political instability is not fully supported by the analysis of petroleum in Mauritanian politics during the period 2001 to 2011. Rather, it has been argued that oil was but one of several political-economic factors that explain the several changes in elite power during the period.

Political division and conflict have long been features of the tribal and multi-ethnic society in Mauritania. Petroleum, or more accurately the promise of its revenues, acted as a contributory but not a decisive factor in the successful coups from 2003 to 2009. These coups and the associated political instability

that preceded and followed them were the product of many complexly related factors, as well as of the confluence of independent events. Some of the more important variables that influenced the flow of events in Mauritania in the period studied include the character of individual elites within the hierarchical Maure society as well as the leadership styles of various key Maure and non-Maure players and their personal interactions. It also included the shifting and often tension-ridden relationships, channelled through formal and informal institutions, between these key people and the wider population.

These domestic political changes were shaped by Mauritania's historical and contemporary geopolitical relations with other regional states and its former colonial master, France, which played a strong role in guiding Mauritania's development path between 2001 and 2011.

Chapter 7 – Summary and Conclusion

This chapter summarises the main findings of the research and their implications for future research, government policies and industry behaviour. The core theme of the study was the role played by the discovery of oil and the establishment of a petroleum industry in the political development of Mauritania from 2001 to 2011. The focus was the contribution of the oil industry to the political instability within government circles that characterised the period and the relevance of the oil curse hypothesis to the understanding of that political instability.

It was argued that the discovery and prospective development of oil played a role in the political instability of Mauritania from 2001 to 2011, but that it was only one of many contributory factors. It was shown that the country's political instability pre-dated the discovery of oil. At the core of this instability was, and still is, a political system dominated by the Bidân in which different factions and tribal segments vied for control of the state and other resources. Political instability manifested itself in the form of autocratic rule with regular and sometimes - albeit seldom - bloody changes in government, violence against various subordinate ethnic sections of the society seeking greater representation within the state, rising economic and political discontent among the general population and the corrupt practices of successive governments. Traditional formal and informal institutions rooted in Mauritania's past had created fault-lines, divisions and hierarchical relationships between tribes and ethnicities, which shape the behaviour of leaders, elites and individuals operating within a neopatrimonial²⁸¹ socio-political system. Oil acted as a lesser catalyst for the political struggles that characterised the period under study, rather than playing a determinative or more decisive role.

In reviewing the wider political and other literature on oil and political instability, it was shown that there are diverse theories and approaches on the

²⁸¹ Refer to footnote 4, page 22

nature of the relationship between them. The best-known approach is that of the oil curse hypothesis, which posits a strong relationship between the discovery and development of oil and political instability. This approach has been disputed by several writers who argue that the causal roots of political conflict and instability in contemporary African states lie in an historical legacy derived from colonialism, the failure of the state to build a legitimate imagined national community, the persistence and promotion of sub-national ethnic and tribal identities, and a record of uneven economic development in which natural resource exploitation was one of several politically destabilising factors. These writers have recognised that the discovery of petroleum has contributed to political instability but that it is important to locate oil's role within the wider historical and political-economic context of the country's development.

The study began by presenting a broad general historical account of the pre-colonial and colonial context of Mauritania's emergence as an independent post-colonial state in 1960. Particular attention was devoted to showing that political instability in the country pre-dated the discovery of oil in the 1990s. This was followed by a detailed examination of the early oil development period from 2001 to 2007 in which the Australian multi-national corporation, Woodside, was the key player on the industry side.

In doing so, emphasis was placed on the voices of those involved directly and indirectly in Mauritanian politics during the post-oil discovery period. These included senior politicians and bureaucrats associated with various governments and the wider largely Bidân communities that provided the bulk of political leadership since independence. It also included oil executives, some opposition politicians and ordinary citizens of the country.

The researcher was initially sceptical that oil played any role in Mauritania's socio-political problems. However, participants' comments and further research pointed to a more complex relationship between oil and political change. The majority of those interviewed, which included senior government

officials at the time, discerned a weak link between petroleum and political instability but all considered coups as endemic to Mauritania and pre-dated the discovery of oil. Very few attributed Mauritania's problems to the discovery and development of petroleum, although there was some variation in responses as to the strength or weakness of the link.

The main conclusion of the research was that the root causes of Mauritania's political instability lie in the historical and present-day interaction between the traditional, segmentary Bidân tribal cultures and their constant struggle to retain political domination over the Haratin and Afro-Mauritanian population within a colonially imposed state system. The key manifestations of this interaction were shown to be the power struggles between rival Bidân tribal groups, led by competent and sometimes charismatic individuals within a society containing a formal, outsider-imposed system and an equally strong system of Bidân affinity and solidarity, termed *Assabiya*. The Bidân tribal society was shown to have evolved for over a millennium to survive in a harsh and unforgiving desert environment, and that the key elements of that society continued to evolve and adapt to the demands of modern urban living in Mauritania. The Bidân and the affiliated Haratin were shown to continue to follow many traditional, unwritten principles in their daily lives rooted in the Bedouin system, or as discussed in Chapter 3, the system of "those that live in the desert", the root meaning of the word "Bedouin". It was argued that the sub-national loyalties of the Bidân were based around the control of particular and shifting territories in which changing alliances, systems of lineage and clan-based reciprocities and the *razzia*, a system of organised raiding, was a central tactic of political control and expansion.

While Bidân culture and their suite of traditional political tactics and institutions have their origins in centuries of pre-colonial desert living, their practices had evolved and adapted to changing political, economic and ecological circumstances. The practice of *razzias* for example, evolved and adapted to the modern setting and was given a new means of institutional expression in inter-tribal political struggles for administrative power and

ethnic domination. When elected or nominated state leaders found themselves in dispute with elite Bidân leaders, they were subject to political pressures that included internal re-shuffling of government and other positions, coups and more extreme forms of violence in some instances.

In addition to the domestic struggles for power, direct intervention by interested foreign powers played a major role in the coups that have overthrown all political leaders in Mauritania since independence in 1960. France's direct assistance with the overthrow of the first president, Ould Daddah, as well as their involvement in the ending of Colonel Haidallah's reign, are just two examples of France's influential position.

However, it was argued that neither the development of oil resources nor the interactions of the nascent industry with the Mauritanian government and its citizenry were root causes in creating the country's social and political instability from 2001 to 2011. At most, the petroleum industry provided yet another opportunity for rent seeking by the powerful political and business elites. In taking this position, the study rejected the populist "oil curse" works, such as those of Shaxson, Maass and Ross who relied on a somewhat crude idea of an almost mechanical relationship between oil and political development. Rather, it was argued that in order to understand resource politics, a more nuanced and specific analysis of the domestic and regional historical social, political and economic environment of the country under study is required.

Future research directions

The present study focused largely on elite Bidân politics. It pointed to a multiplicity of links between socio-political instability and unemployment, poverty, socio-political exclusion, marginalisation and ethnicity, all of which are rooted in Mauritanian history. Future research needs to take a wider societal view and include greater emphasis on the politics of expectation and resentment among the large numbers of less politically and economically powerful sections of the population, including the Haratin and Afro-

Mauritanians, the urban residents outside Nouakchott, rural dwellers as well as foreign participants in private and parastatal petroleum companies. There are signs of growing opposition among the non-Bidân political and economic opposition to Bidân rule. There remains in Mauritania a key fault line between Afro-Mauritanians and the Bidân, in which the ambiguous ethnic-cum-class positioning of the Haratin is likely to play a greater role in the coming years. The Bidân or white Maures have been relatively successful in manipulating ethnic and other allegiances to retain a stranglehold on power but this may change in the future.

A second fruitful future line of inquiry suggested by the study is a comparison of the experience of Mauritania with other oil-rich countries in the region and in Africa in general. Such a comparison will allow a clearer identification of the specific configuration of political and economic circumstances that have shaped the relationship between oil and political instability in Mauritania. It will also provide a means of identifying what Mauritania shares in common with other oil-rich states and thus contribute to a more theoretically rich analysis of the political economy of resource development in Africa and beyond. Such a comprehensive study of other newly oil-rich African and other countries and their political environment would complement the knowledge generated by the present research. Patterns and trends of political and social circumstances in relation to natural resources and generated wealth or promise of wealth may emerge that would extend and refine our understanding of the theoretical relevance of the “oil curse” theory as it relates to present-day Mauritania.

Implication for the practices and procedures of the petroleum industry

The study devoted considerable space to an examination of the relationship between Woodside and the Mauritanian polity. It was observed that Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall strongly criticised the actions of several Woodside employees, contractors and advisers, considering them to have acted inappropriately in their dealings with the Mauritanian government of the time. It was suggested that several of these individuals, who constituted the face of

Woodside in Mauritania, misjudged the sophistication and strategic business acumen of the Bidân with whom they were dealing at all levels of operations.

The study was unable to provide definitive evidence of major graft and corruption in Woodside's dealings with the government, although it is highly likely that some extra-legal collusion did occur at times between individuals on both sides to facilitate day-to-day business. Mauritanian political culture shares much in common with other neo-patrimonial states in Africa where traditional distributive practices clash with modern systems of legal-rational bureaucratic rationality. Such practices favour those with political-*cum*-kin-based affiliations to political and economic leaders.

Woodside's lack of appreciation of the importance of a deeper understanding of local business practices was evident at all levels of operations, including board and management. For example, the expatriate workforce consisted of virtually no French or Arabic speakers. This serious limitation should have been resolved at the very beginning of onsite operations.

On a broader level as a company, Woodside approached operating in Mauritania without first having acquired basic knowledge of what it might be like to work within a society dominated by deeply rooted tribal affinities and inter-tribal competition within a wider national context of clashing sub-national loyalties. Although the broader operational plant and personnel security concerns were very likely adequately covered by Woodside's Security Department, a major blindspot was the lack of awareness surrounding intercultural relations.

The company was ill prepared for dealing with entrenched nepotism, paternalism, and rent-seeking and other seemingly self-serving behaviour of Mauritanian elites. It is not surprising, then, that Woodside personnel found it difficult if not impossible to ensure that Mauritians followed what they regarded as proper legal and administrative procedure. Thus, at the policy level, it is important that companies operating in differing political and

cultural environments provide training to their staff in the wider history and cultural developments of the countries and regions in which they work.

Implication for the policies of Mauritania

The study has argued that oil development has played more of a catalytic than causative role in Mauritania's political instability in the 2001 to 2011 period. However, it is also important to recognise that political instability itself can play a major role in deterring foreign investment, as was evident after the ethnic conflict of 1989-1991. There are obvious lessons in this for the ruling groups in Mauritania who must make greater efforts to provide greater security and predictability for foreign investors if they seek to ensure a steady and more durable flow of investment. Prospective foreign investors must be encouraged to see the country as having a stable and viable business environment with durable terms and reliable local partners.

Unfortunately, in the last two years, Mauritania's membership in the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) has been suspended. This is not good for its profile in the international investment community. Adherence to the demands of the EITI regulations for timely, accurate and transparent reporting of resource expenditures and revenues must be restored.

Today, following the general downturn of business activity caused by Woodside's departure in late 2007, there remains the potential for a renewal of petroleum activity and for oil revenues to contribute significantly to the development of the country. Tullow Oil's website²⁸² attests to the fact that the company, unlike the majority of firms that have left the country since 2007, is working to bring the Banda gas discovery "on stream" by 2016.

Such a renewal can result in benefits for the population of Mauritania but it must take place within a political system that is more responsive to the needs of the wider population. This will require a much greater openness of the

²⁸² www.tulloil.com

institutions of government and the state to members of the subordinate ethnic communities who are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with ‘politics-as-usual’. It also means that investment decisions, whether in natural resources or other sectors of the economy, do not simply favour those with the ear of government. This study has shown what can happen when a ruling elite is determined to retain its political and economic hold over the majority of the population. Perhaps this is the main curse that Mauritania needs to overcome if it is to prosper.

Acronyms and Terms

	Description ²⁸³
Abd	Abd means "servant of" or "slave of" as in Abdallah or "servant of God" or Abdelkader or "servant of the leader".
Abid	This is a Hassaniya word meaning "black". Note the similarity with the word meaning "servant" or "slave".
Afro-Mauritanian	This term denotes Mauritians of pure and mixed black African descent, principally Peulh but also Soninké, Wolof and Bambara. They commonly speak French and the language of their ethnic group. Some of the more educated also know Hassaniya, but do not openly speak it. The term is often used interchangeably with 'Peulh'.
AGIP	AGIP is a former Italian automotive gasoline, Diesel, LPG, lubricants, fuel oil, and bitumen retailer established in 1926. It is a subsidiary of the multinational petroleum company Eni, one of the ten largest oil companies in the world
Ahmed Hamza	Hamza is an influential mayor of Nouakchott.
Ahmed Ould Daddah	Ahmed Ould Daddah, born 7 August 1942, is a Mauritanian economist, politician and civil servant. He is the half-brother of Moktar Ould Daddah, first President of Mauritania, and like him belongs to the Marabout Oualad Béiri tribe. He is currently the President of the Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD) and was designated as the official leader of the opposition parties (COD) following the 2007 presidential election, which he lost to Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi.
AMOCO	Amoco Corporation, commonly known as AMOCO, is a multinational chemical and oil company, founded in 1889. AMOCO's contribution to our modern industry includes two essential innovations: the gasoline tanker truck and the drive-through filling station.

²⁸³ Descriptions sourced principally online from Wikipedia

	AMOCO was merged into British Petroleum (BP) in the 1990s.
Arabisation	Arabisation describes growing cultural influence on a non-Arab population that changes into one that speaks Arabic and incorporates Arab culture and Arab identity. It was most prominently achieved during the 7th century Arabian Muslim conquests that spread the Arabic language, culture, and the religion of Islam to the lands they conquered. Arabisation in Mauritania is a government-sponsored move for the whole of the Mauritanian community, irrespective of ethnicity. It requires all to speak Arabic and adopt Arab culture. It was tried several times and failed as a result of strong protest by the 30% of non-Hassaniya speaking Afro-Mauritanians.
Assabiya	Assabiya refers to social solidarity with an emphasis on unity, group consciousness and sense of shared purpose, and social cohesion. The term is generally analogous to solidarity. However, the term is often negatively associated because it can sometimes suggest loyalty to one's group regardless of circumstances, or partisanship.
ASX	ASX stands for the Australian Securities Exchange.
Bambara	The Bambara are also Mandé people, primarily living in Mali where they are the dominant Mandé group with 80% of the population speaking the Bambara language, as well as Guinea, Burkina Faso and Senegal, with only a small number living in Mauritania.
Beni Hassan	The Beni Hassan warrior tribes migrated from the Southern Arabian peninsula into North Africa around the 15th century. They reputedly were responsible for finally driving most black inhabitants from the northern and central region of what is now Mauritania, southwards to the Senegal River Valley, taking many into slavery. They subjugated the Berber tribes, permanently defeating them in 1674 after a thirty-year war at Char Bobba, imposing themselves at the apex of the newly established Maurish social hierarchy that survives today.

	<p>The Berber tribes became tributaries to the Arab conquerers, many "giving up the sword for the Book" and became the bearers of religion. Berbers are lighter-skinned than the Arabic Beni Hassan and, as lighter-skinned women were preferred by the conquerers, much intermarriage occurred. The rift between the religious Berber tribes and warrior tribes of purer Arabic blood is, however, still a character of the society that many still feel today.</p>
Berber	<p>The Berbers are an ethnically diverse group that inhabited the northwestern region of Africa, most especially along the Mediterranean coast. The diverse ethnicities that may have contributed to their genetic lineage are invaders that came from the north through the Iberian peninsula or from the regions bordering the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, interbreed with local and original, black African inhabitants.</p>
Bidân	<p>Or 'Beydanes' are self-denominated 'white' Hassaniya-speaking Maures. They continue to regard themselves principally as divided into religious or Marabou tribes and Beni Hassan or warrior tribes. Each tribe or grouping of tribes regard itself as descendant from a common ancestor responsible for the formation of the lineage, and it is often deemed, correctly or invented, as the Prophet himself. In addition, there are 'small' (insignificant) tribes of artisans (M'allmin) and entertainers (Igawen). A Bidân approached to participate in the present research refused to do so because he was "... a small man, with a small job from a small tribe, and he did not have any knowledge". He was from a minor tribe of entertainers and his humbleness contrasted greatly with those of the many 'warriors' and 'marabous' encountered in government and business settings in Mauritania.</p>
'Big' nomads	<p>"Big" or "Grand" nomads are so named by the Maures, because of their nomadic life roaming over vast territories of northern, desert Mauritania. They were principally of brown-skinned Arab descent, intermixed with Berber and black African ancestors.</p>

Biram Dah Abeid	<p>Biram Dah Abeid's paternal grandmother was a slave and his father was freed at birth. He is thus a Hartani human rights activist. He founded the movement "Initiative for the Resurgence of Abolitionists" (IRA-Mauritania), fighting against slavery in Mauritania. In 2013, he received the United Nations Front Line Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk from the Irish NGO Front Line Defenders.</p>
Brakna	<p>Brakna is a region in southwest Mauritania. Its capital is Aleg. Another major city is Boghé, where racial confrontations resulted in the death of a Peulh student in 2011 at the beginning of the latest controversially executed government census. The Senegal River runs along the region's border with Senegal. Following the events of 1989, many Afro-Mauritanian natives from the Brakna were forced into exile to Senegal.</p>
Bretton Woods' institutions	<p>The Bretton Woods system of monetary management established the rules for commercial and financial relations among the world's major industrial states in the mid-20th century. The Bretton Woods system was the first example of a fully negotiated monetary order intended to govern monetary relations among independent nation-states. Preparing to rebuild the international economic system while World War II was still raging, all 44 Allied nations gathered at the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, for the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, also known as the Bretton Woods Conference and signed the Bretton Woods Agreement, setting up a system of rules, institutions, and procedures to regulate the international monetary system and established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which today is part of the World Bank Group. These institutions became operational in 1945. The chief features of the Bretton Woods system were an obligation for each country to adopt a monetary policy that maintained the exchange rate by tying its currency to the U.S. dollar and for the</p>

	IMF to bridge temporary imbalances of payments. On 15 August 1971, the United States unilaterally terminated convertibility of the US\$ to gold. This ended the Bretton Woods system.
CAP	The "Coalition for pacific Alternation" is one of the major political parties running in the present legislative elections. In these elections will be selected the 218 municipal councils and 147 deputies who will sit in the National Assembly for the next five years. Prominent members are Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, Boidiel Ould Houmeit, Abdel Salem Ould Horma.
CAQDAS software	Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) is the use of computer software to aid qualitative research such as transcription analysis, coding and text interpretation, recursive abstraction, content analysis, discourse analysis.
Chinguetti Oilfield	The Chinguetti oilfield is an oil field located off the Mauritanian coast in 800 m water depth. Discovered by the ELIXIR, HARDMAN, WOODSIDE and AGIP joint venture consortium in late May 2001, it is named after the city of Chinguetti. Originally estimated at 123 million barrels, it is significant as the first commercial discovery of oil in the country, opening a new region for offshore petroleum exploration. Production of 75,000 barrels per day began in 2006, but declined rapidly after the start of production due to geological complexity. By November 2006 daily production has fallen as low as 3,000 barrel per day, but subsequently steadied at some 8,000 barrels per day, enough to make it marginally economic. It is expected to continue production until 2015 at which time it will be decommissioned and abandoned.
Christine Milne	Christine Anne Milne (born 14 May 1953) became leader of the Greens in the Tasmanian Parliament and the first female leader of a political party in Tasmania when Bob Brown stood down in 1993 to contest the federal election. She is now an Australian Senator and has been leader of the parliamentary caucus of the Australian Greens since April 2012.

CNRS/CERI	CNRS stands for National Centre of Scientific Research, a French government-funded and Paris-based research institute renowned for its ground-breaking work on many fronts. CERI, the International Centre for Research, is a government-funded think-tank of which some 50% of its members are also CNRS members. CERI members often provide expertise as consultants to ministries, parliamentary committees, international organisations and private companies.
COD	"Coordination de l'opposition démocratique" or the "Mauritanian Opposition for Democracy" is a coalition of fourteen opposition parties headed by the president of the RFD party, Ahmed Ould Daddah, brother of the first president of Mauritania.
Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall	Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, born 1953 in Nouakchott, is a political and military figure, as well as a wealthy businessman in Mauritania. He served as the transitional military leader of Mauritania following the coup d'état in August 2005 until 19 April 2007 when he relinquished power to an elected government. He was a long-time ally of President Maaouya Ould Taya, and participated in the December 1984 coup that brought Taya himself to power. Prior to the 2005 coup, he had been director of the national police force, the Sûreté Nationale, since 1987. On 3 August 2005, Taya was ousted in a bloodless military coup by a group of officers. These took power as the Military Council for Justice and Democracy and announced that Vall was the head of the council. He did not take the title of President because he said it should be reserved for elected leaders.
Colonel Mohamed Abdel Aziz	Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, born 20 December 1956, is the President of Mauritania at time of writing. A career soldier and high-ranking officer, he was a leading figure in the August 2005 coup that deposed President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya. In August 2008, he led another coup toppling the elected civilian head of the country, President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. Following the 2008 coup, Abdel

	<p>Aziz became President of the High Council of State. He resigned from that post in April 2009 in order to stand as a candidate in the July 2009 presidential election, which he won in what many describe as a constitutional coup d'état. He was sworn in on 5 August 2009 and is due for re-election in 2014.</p>
Cost Oil	<p>Cost Oil is the portion of produced oil that the operator retains on an annual basis to recover certain costs that have been incurred in exploration and production, as defined and specified within a PSC and agreed to by the host government that passed the PSC as law.</p>
Convenience sampling	<p>Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher.</p>
Democracy	<p>Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally - either directly or through elected representatives - in the proposal, development and creation of laws. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable free and equal participation by all eligible citizens. Several variants of democracy exist, but there are two basic forms, both of which concern how the body of all eligible citizens executes its will. One form of democracy is direct democracy, in which all eligible citizens have direct and active participation in the decision making of the government. In the other form of democracy, called representative democracy, the whole body of eligible citizens remain the sovereign power but political power is exercised indirectly through elected representatives. The concept of representative democracy arose in western Europe largely from ideas and institutions that developed during the European Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, and the American and French Revolutions and many of its characteristics are not immediately applicable to African social and political environments.</p>

Elite	An elite in political and sociological theory, is a small group of people who control a disproportionate amount of wealth or political power. The basis for power elite membership is institutional power, namely an influential position within a prominent private or public organisation. An elite is a selected person, superior in terms of abilities or qualities to the rest of a group or society. In pre-colonial and colonial times, it denoted individuals who were selected or stood out for their inner abilities and capabilities, most especially in academic achievement. Today, the term has altered to mean people who have the most wealth or status in a society and are thus the most powerful group acting individually or in unison to maintain their position in society.
Elixir Corporation Pty Ltd	ELIXIR was a private, Perth-based oil exploration company founded by the researcher in 1998. It was bought out in June 2001 by ROC Oil Company Limited on the discovery of the Chinguetti Oilfield for a return on investment of some 3200% for the shareholders of ELIXIR.
Ethnicity	Ethnicity or ethnic group is a socially defined category of people who identify with each other based on a shared social experience or ancestry. Membership is associated with shared cultural heritage, ancestry, history, homeland, language (dialect) or ideology, and with symbolic systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, physical appearance, etc. It is an important way by which people may identify themselves or by which they may be identified with a larger group.
First Oil	The term usually refers to the date on which the first barrel of oil is recovered from a newly producing oilfield.

FLAM

The African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (in French: Forces de Libération Africaines de Mauritanie, or FLAM) is an Afro-Mauritanian paramilitary organisation primarily made up of Peulh. It was co-founded in 1983 by Ibrahima Moctar Sarr as tensions increased between Bidân and Afro-Mauritanians after severe political instability and a controversial land reform was enacted in 1981. The group endorsed, but did not initiate, a violent overthrow of the regime, and was quickly outlawed. In 1986, it published the Manifesto of the oppressed black Mauritanian, which detailed government discrimination, and demanded the overthrow of the Maurish elite rulers. Its main areas of strength were and still are in the southern areas of the country and especially among the Harpulaar population. Following the coup d'état of Col. Ely Mohamed Vall in August 2005, the transitional junta stated the government would handle the continuing question of resettlement of refugees. Following a recent rapprochement initiated by President Abdel Aziz, a reformist wing of the FLAM (FLAM-Renovation) split off from the main organization and its leader has returned to Mauritania in October 2013, in order to participate in Mauritania's political transition.

Foreign Direct Investment or FDI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is the direct investment into production or business in a country by an individual or company of another country, either by buying a company in the target country or by expanding operations of an existing business in that country. It is in contrast to portfolio investment, which is a passive investment in the securities of another country such as stocks and bonds. In a narrow sense, foreign direct investment refers to building new facilities, but more broadly, it includes "mergers and acquisitions, building new facilities, reinvesting profits earned from overseas operations and intra company loans".

GDP	Gross domestic product is the market value of all officially recognised final goods and services produced within a country in a year, or other given period. On a per capita basis, GDP is considered an indicator of the standard of living of a country, although it does not give the distribution across the population and in a segmented society can give a distorted impression of the general wealth of a community.
Hardman Resources Limited	HARDMAN was a public ASX-listed company valued at some AUD 6 million at the time of entering into the Mauritanian joint venture with ELIXIR in 1996. It was absorbed by TULLOW Oil plc in 2005 for an estimated AUD 1.47 billion.
Hartani (pl. Haratin)	The Haratin or 'black' Maures are the freed-slaves and descendants slaves of black African ethnic groups raided by Bidân since their arrival in the 8th century. They were Arabised; they lost knowledge of their ethnic roots, speak mostly Hassaniya and consider themselves of Arab descent. They constitute some 40% of Mauritania's population and, because of that, the Bidân fear their rapprochement to the Afro-Mauritanian community and the end of the socio-political hegemony of the 'white' Maures.
Hassaniya	Hassaniya is an Arabic dialect originally spoken by the Beni Hassan Bedouin tribes that migrated into northwestern Africa and extended their authority over most of Mauritania and Western Sahara between the 15th and 17th centuries.
Idawali	This is a "grand nomad" Maure supertribe originally inhabiting the region of Tagant in central Mauritania. Historically, after settling in the region of north Africa, the members of this tribe became able traders and merchants, also controlling several of the great caravan arteries along which goods moved north and south across the Sahara. Aligning themselves with the Smacides in the 1980s, the Idawali have grown in economic and political

	importance since then. They have lost some political ground since 2008, with the stricter reign of President Mohamed Abdel Aziz, but their continuing economic strength is reflected by the growing economic importance of the BCI Bank throughout West Africa, ably lead by its president, Isselmou Ould Didi Ould Tajedine.
Idouaich	A supertribe in southern Mauritania
Inal	Inal is a hamlet 255 km from Nouadhibou along the train line from Zouérat. In 1990, a detention camp was set up at the military base about a kilometre to the west of Inal. There some 550 military and civilian Afro-Mauritanians, principally Peulh were held, tortured and executed by Bidân military personnel, documented by the sole escapee Mahamadou Sy in "L'enfer d'Inal - Mauritanie: L'horreur des camps", 2000 L'Harmattan: Paris.
Islamic Republic of Mauritania	As an Islamic state, Mauritania has adopted Islam as the foundation for its political institutions and laws, but this application is moderate and it has not fully implemented the Islamic Khilafah ruling system, instead partly embodying French and western regulations in its body of laws.
"La Baule" Franco-African Summit speech by President Mitterrand, June 1990	Responding to a democratic movement in Africa after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, François Mitterrand made his La Baule speech in June 1990 that tied development aid to democratic efforts from former French colonies. Seeing an "East wind" blowing in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, he stated that a "Southern wind" was also blowing in Africa, and that state leaders had to respond to the populations' wishes and aspirations by a "democratic opening", which included a representative system, free elections, multipartism, freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, and abolition of censorship. Claiming that France was the country making the most important effort concerning development aid, he announced that the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) would henceforth receive only grants from

	<p>France, as opposed to loans, in order to combat the massive increase of Third World debt during the 1980s. He criticised interventionism in sovereign matters, which was according to him only another form of "colonialism". However, according to Mitterrand, this did not imply lessened concern on the part of Paris for its former colonies.</p>
Lobby	<p>The dictionary definition is "a group of people seeking to influence legislators on a particular issue". In Mauritania, a lobby takes one particular political meaning, indicating a group of like-minded business and political elites that strive to influence the government to pass laws and regulations that give advantage to its members (rent seeking).</p>
Mahfoud Ould Bettah	<p>Minister of Justice in the Taya regime, he became Director General of the Ministry of Justice in 2005 after Taya's overthrow. He presently serves as President of the Bar in Mauritania. He was one of the seventeen lawyers assigned to the "Woodside Affair" in 2006 by Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall. Like Ely Mohamed Vall, he is also an active and influential participant in the COD, as well as an aspiring contender in the upcoming 2014 presidential election. He was also Director General of the Ministry of Justice in 2005, and is presently President of the Bar.</p>
Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian	<p>The Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian was published in April 1986 by the FLAM. It details racial discrimination in Mauritania against the Black Africans by the Arabophone Bidân minority. The document was in French, and principally targeted the sympathy of non-Mauritanian audiences. It focuses on the discrimination against Black African Mauritanians by the minority Arabophone political elite and documents the racial segregation in every sector of public life, in the educational system, the army, the mass media and the judicial system. The manifesto urged the Black majority of Mauritania to use any means necessary in order to overthrow the Arabophone military junta. In September 1986, the Arab military regime of Mauritania arrested thirty-six Mauritanians of Black African origin</p>

	<p>for the publication and the distribution of the manifesto. Twenty-one of them were brought to trial on charges of "undermining national unity" and "making propaganda of a racial or ethnic character". Among them was Ibrahima Moctar Sarr the founder and president of FLAM, as well as many other prominent members of the academic life of Mauritania. All of defendants pleaded not guilty, but all were convicted, sentences varied from six-month to ten-year prison sentences, exile, and loss of civil rights.</p>
Marabout or Marabou	<p>The term Marabout is derived from the Arabic word "Mourabit" or one who staffed the small, fortified bases that protected trade routes and isolated Muslim communities in early Muslim North Africa. Today the term refers to Muslim teachers who are religious leaders, preach at mosques or run religious schools. Others may be wandering holy men who survive on alms. Still others practice pre-Islamic traditions, making amulets for good luck, presiding at various ceremonies, telling the future, and in some cases actively guiding the lives of followers.</p>
Maure	<p>In the sense used in this research thesis, the word 'Maure' is used to denote inhabitants of Mauritania predominantly descendant from an Arab, Berber (and to a lesser extent Black African) ethnic mix as well as their Black African slaves and ex-slaves. The 'white' Maures refer to themselves as Bidân, while the Maures of black African ancestry are referred to as Haratani (plural; Haratin).</p>
Messaoud Ould Boulkheir	<p>Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, born 1943, is among the first Haratin to become a political leader in Mauritania. He contributed significantly to the end of the racially motivated violence of the 1989 - 1991 period, and presently serves as founder and president of the People's Progressive Alliance party which strives to protect the right of the poor and the emancipation of slaves. Messaoud has also served as President of the National Assembly of Mauritania since April 2007.</p>

Military junta	A junta or military junta is a government led by a committee of military leaders. The term derives from the Spanish word 'junta' meaning a committee or a meeting, specifically by a board of directors. Sometimes it becomes a military dictatorship, though the terms are not synonymous.
Mint	“Mint” means “daughter of” as for “Ould” above.
Mohamed Fall Ould Bah	Mohamed Fall Ould Bah runs a respected accountancy practice in Nouakchott. He is well regarded as an elite of the Nouakchott society and a mature student who at 58 returned to formal studies and completed a doctorate in finance.
Mohamed Ould Elabed	Mohamed Ould Elabed. Ould Elabed is a member of the Idawali tribe, a tribe that shared power during the reign of Taya and the Smacides. He had been Adviser to the Prime Minister for many years during Taya’s reign right up to the 2005 coup that ousted Taya, then Minister of Economic Affairs for Ely Mohamed Vall's Junta. Ould Elabed, graduate of the elite ENA institution in Paris and the “eminence grise” of many economic “reforms” by the Mauritanian government since the 1990s, is today a highly paid independent consultant to the government (Samuel 2011, 25A).
Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody	"Saïd", in spite of his alleged Smacide Hartani origin, is a respected member of the Nouakchott elites. He is highly educated and was ambassador to the USA for many years.
Movement du 25 Février	A younger generation of Mauritians created the Movement February 25 in order to protest succession of military regimes in Mauritania, and most especially the interference of France in the internal affairs of the country and its debilitating influence. This influence became known most specifically in the six-week quasi-abduction of President Abdel Aziz to Paris by French forces after his alleged accidental shooting on 13 October 2012.

Natural resources	<p>In the context of this research, natural resources are materials derived from the environment and are essential for our survival and used for satisfying our wants. Every fabricated product is composed of natural resources at its fundamental level. A subsoil natural resource is a material resource found underground and extracted by various mechanical or chemical means. The extracted material must be processed to obtain the precise added-value resource such as metal ores, oil, and most forms of energy. Natural resources can add substantially to a country's wealth, but may also be the root cause of socio-political problems, a condition known as the "resource curse". In cases such as for Mauritania, the implication that subsoil natural resources are the root cause of these problems is a simplistic approach to a complex set of conditions in a society predisposed to socio-political instability because of long pre-existing characteristics.</p>
OAF	<p>Afrique Occidentale Française or French West Africa was a federation of eight French colonial territories in Africa: Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (now Mali), French Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Dahomey (now Benin) and Niger. The capital of the federation was Dakar. The federation existed from 1895 until 1960.</p>
Oilfield	<p>The term refers to a region of many oil wells extracting crude oil and associated gas (petroleum) from one or several petroleum reservoirs below ground. In addition to the exploration, stimulation and production wells drilled over an extended region, there are usually also pipelines to transport the oil elsewhere, and support facilities that are typical of an oilfield development.</p>
OMVS	<p>The "Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Senegal" (OMVS, or Senegal River Basin Development Authority) is an organisation grouping Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal for the purpose of jointly managing the Senegal River and its drainage basin.</p>

Operation Lamantin	<p>Opération Lamantin was a December 1977 – July 1978 military intervention by France on the behalf of the Mauritanian government, in its war against Sahrawi guerrilla fighters of the Polisario Front, seeking independence for Western Sahara. Mauritania, a former French colony, had invaded and annexed the southern part of Western Sahara in 1975, with Morocco seizing the northern portion. Both states were opposed by the Polisario resistance movement. Contrary to expectations, Mauritania's weak army was nearly overrun by the Polisario, especially after the latter gained access to modern weaponry from Algeria. In December 1977, President Giscard d'Estaing ordered the French Air Force to deploy in Mauritania and start bombing Polisario columns with napalm, after French technicians were taken as prisoners of war in a Polisario raid on the Zouérat iron mines, Mauritania's most precious economic asset.</p>
Opportunity sampling	<p>Opportunity sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that consists of taking the sample of participants from individuals readily available at the time of the study and that fit the criteria demanded of participants, eg. Mauritanian, Haratin. It is a popular sampling technique as it is easy in terms of time and therefore financial resources. It is particularly used when a researcher has no control over who is studied. There are many weaknesses of opportunity sampling. It can produce a biased sample, as it is easy for the researcher to choose people from a narrow group unrepresentative of the target population being researched. A further problem with opportunity sampling is that participants may decline to take part and sampling becomes a self-selected sample.</p>
Oualad	<p>Meaning "descendants of" and usually used to indicate a tribe or group of tribes with the same ancestral origins.</p>

Oualad Bousbaa	This is a major tribe from the Inchiri region of central western Mauritania. They are believed to have made their fortune by being able merchants and grabbing the opportunity that was offered in the 1960s of servicing the Zouérat Iron Ore Mine and associated railway line in terms of maintenance, personnel and supplies. Aligning themselves with the Smacides through their early link with President Taya, they also became prominent in the military and in politics. Their most prominent members are Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall and President Mohamed Abdel Aziz.
Oualad Nasr	Warrior tribe from southeast Mauritania and centred around Aloun el Altrouss. It is believed that Saleh Ould Hanenna is from this tribe.
Ould	Meaning “son of” is a Maure (Bidân and Haratin) way of denoting lineage affiliation, but is being increasingly dropped in recent years with the westernisation of surnames, most especially in those exposed to the international scene, such as politicians and businesspersons.
Participant	The word is used for individuals who assisted directly in the present research by being formally interviewed and agreed to the interview being recorded and used in the thesis. Many Mauritians and non-Mauritians contributed to the information included in this document. However, they are not mentioned as participants as they were not formally interviewed.
Patrimonial patronage system	Max Weber defined patrimonialism as a form of traditional domination. In its simplest form, it defines the authority of fathers within families. For Weber, patrimonial monarchies and similar forms of government were projections of the rule of the father within the family onto a broader set of social relationships. There are two main forms for Weber. One form of patrimonialism is characterised by a top-down structure where the emperor or sultan rules based on his own legitimate authority through traditional bureaucratic officials. The other form of patrimonialism is also top down. However, the

	<p>basis for its legitimate authority lies outside of the central ruler's authority. Of note and adding weight to President Abdel Aziz's utterance on democracy to President Sarkozy, is Weber's overarching argument that with modernity, traditional bureaucratic patrimonial forms of government eventually give way to modern capitalist bureaucratic rationalism as the main principle of both government and governance.</p>
Petroleum	<p>Petroleum is a naturally occurring complex mixture of organic hydrocarbons of various molecular weights ranging from semi-solid, waxy material to liquid and gaseous compounds. It is found beneath the Earth's surface in sedimentary rocks within ancient seas and basins and formed when large quantities of dead organisms are buried, undergo intense heat and pressure and the resulting hydrocarbons are concentrated within geological traps. It is discovered mostly through very expensive exploration for these traps and drilling. If enough quantity of hydrocarbons is found to make their production economic, a production plant is built to collect process and distribute the hydrocarbon commodities brought to the surface.</p>
Petroliferous basin	<p>A sedimentary basin is a region of the earth's crust of long-standing subsidence creating a repository for material eroded from adjacent higher ground. There, organic material, derived from large quantities of dead organisms, is incorporated into the sedimentary layers that are deposited in the basin-like structure. When these organic material bearing rocks are subjected to intense pressure and heat, they produce petroleum potentially recoverable for use as a "fossil" fuel.</p>
Petronas	<p>PETRONAS, short for Petroliaam Nasional Berhad, is a Malaysian oil and gas company founded on August 17, 1974. It is a wholly owned by the Government of Malaysia. It is ranked among Fortune Global 500's largest corporations in the world. Fortune ranks PETRONAS as the 68th largest company in the world in 2012, as well as the 12th most</p>

	profitable company in the world and the most profitable in Asia.
Peulh	Peulh are Mauritanian people of the Fulani ethnic group, the largest migratory cattle-owning group in the world and one of the most widely dispersed and culturally most diverse people of the African continent. Some confusion exists as to their ethnic makeup as many of their former slaves present themselves as authentic Peulh. Many Peulh in Mauritania practiced, and many are reputed still to practice slavery in the same manner as the Bidân.
Polisario or Polisario Front	The Polisario Front, or simply POLISARIO from the Spanish abbreviation for "Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro", is a Sahrawi rebel national liberation movement working for ending Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. Since 1979, the Polisario Front has been recognized by the United Nations as the representative of the people of Western Sahara. Western Sahara has been a member of the African Union since 1982, the reason for Morocco retiring its membership in 1984.
President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya	Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, born November 28, 1941, was Prime Minister of Mauritania from 1981 to 1984 and president from 1984 to 2005. He was ousted by a military coup led by his closest military colleagues, Colonel Mohamed Abdel Aziz, General Muhammad Ould Al-Ghazwani and General Ely Mohamed Vall in 2005.
President Moktar Ould Daddah	Moktar Ould Daddah was born 25 December 1924, to an important marabout family of the Oualad Béiri tribe in Boutilimit, Mauritania. Ould Daddah completed his secondary schooling in Nice, and then moved to Paris graduating in Law as the first Mauritanian to hold a university degree. Returning to Mauritania in 1957, Daddah joined the centre-left Progressive Mauritanian Union and was elected President of the Executive Council. In 1959, he established a new political party, the Mauritanian Regroupment Party. In the last pre-independence legislative elections held later that year, his party won every seat in the National Assembly, and he was appointed

	<p>Prime Minister. He was the first President of Mauritania from 1960, when his country gained its independence from France until 1978, when he was deposed in a military coup d'état. After a period of detention in a jail in Oualata, he was exiled to Paris returning to Mauritania in 2002. He died 14 October 2003 after having written and edited his autobiography, "La Mauritanie contre vents et marées".</p>
President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi	<p>Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, born 1938, is a politician who served in the government during the 1970s. After a long period of absence from politics, he won the March 2007 presidential election, taking office on 19 April 2007. He was deposed in a military coup d'état on 6 August 2008.</p>
Production flow rate	<p>A facility's rate of production of oil measured in barrels per day, stored at an onsite facility for subsequent sale. At the offshore Chinguetti Oilfield production facility, flow rate into the onsite FPSO (Floating Production and Storage and Offloading) vessel, dropped from a high of 75,000 barrels a day on first production on 26 February 2006 to below 3,000 barrels a day in November 2006, later steadying at a barely viable 8,000 barrels a day.</p>
PSC	<p>PSCs or Production Sharing Contracts are a common type of contract signed between a government and an oil company (or group of companies) which govern the conditions of operation in the country for the operator and how the revenues or the oil itself will be apportioned between the government, the company operating the extraction plant and the joint venture partners.</p>
PSC amendments	<p>As PSCs are passed by decree into law in Mauritania, any change or amendment must be done constitutionally, since it is a formal change to the text of the written constitution of the state. In Mauritania, as in many other countries, the constitutions require that amendments cannot be enacted unless they have passed a special procedure that is more stringent than that required of ordinary legislation and may take from several months</p>

	to over a year to be passed by both houses of parliament. .
Pulaar	Pulaar is a Fula language spoken as a first language by the Peulh and related tribes originating from the Senegal River Valley. Speakers of Pulaar as known as Haalpulaar'en and inhabit not only Mauritania, but also Senegal, The Gambia and Mali.
Purposive or judgemental sampling	In purposive sampling, the researcher chooses the sample of participants from a particular population, based on whom the researcher thinks would be appropriate for advancing the research topic.
Qabila	A Hassaniya word roughly translated as 'federation of tribes'.
Radio-trottoir	The term, meaning, "footpath radio" refers to the grassroots, informal communications networks that are used, primarily in urban African settings, to relay information that is deemed of sufficient interest. Information passed on by "footpath or pavement radio" is mistrusted by a number of academics, journalists and politicians, citing its anonymous nature, and the tendency to include tales and ludicrous notions. Some, however, argues that pavement radio is a modern continuation of the African oral tradition.
Referral or snowball sampling	Referral or snowball sampling is a method typically used with little known populations where members of these populations have not all been previously identified and are more difficult to locate or contact. Obtaining a sample from such a population typically does not allow for the use of traditional random sampling methodologies requiring that the entire population be known. Methodologies such as referral sampling employ the presumed social networks that exist between members of a target population to build a sample.
Reign of the Colonels	The period between 1978 to present is referred to by most Mauritians as the "reign of the colonels", indicating that the military has reigned over government since the overthrow of the first president, Moktar Ould Daddah.

Rent seeking	Rent seeking is the use of social institutions such as the power of government to redistribute wealth among different groups without creating new wealth. Lobbyists influence political leaders to redirect rents arriving in the country for the benefit of all, and 'wasting' resources in an effort at redirecting it to increase their personal wealth.
Sahara Desert	The Sahara, or 'the Great Desert' in Arabic, is the world's hottest desert and the third largest desert after Antarctica and the Arctic. At over 9,400,000 sq km, it makes the Sahara almost as large as the United States. It stretches from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean and reaches to the Mediterranean Sea to the north. To the south, it is delimited by the Sahel, a belt of semi-arid tropical savannah that covers northern Sub-Saharan Africa.
Sahel	The Sahel is the semi-arid zone of transition between the Sahara Desert and the savannah to the south and stretches from Northern Africa to the Red Sea. Sahel is derived from an Arabic word meaning "shore", describing the Sahel as being a coastline delimiting the sand of the Sahara.
Saleh Ould Hanenna	Hanenna served in the Mauritanian Army and rose to the rank of Major before being forced out in 2000. In June 2003, he led an attempted coup, aiming to overthrow President Maaouya Ould Taya. He commanded a rebel section of the Army during two days of heavy fighting in Nouakchott during which some 300 civilians and military personnel are alleged to have died. With the failure of the coup, Hanenna initially escaped capture, but he was arrested on October 9, 2004. The Taya Government accused Hanenna of attempting to organise coups on two further occasions, in August and September 2004, with the alleged backing of Libya and Burkina Faso and he was given life imprisonment on 3 February 2005. In August 2005, Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall led a successful coup in the country. The Military Council for Justice and Democracy, which took over from the government, released Hanenna in an amnesty in early September 2005 and he

	took part as a candidate in the 2007 civilian elections.
Sampling procedure	The key requirement of sampling procedure in social sciences is for the sampling of a population to be representative of the target in order that meaningful information may be returned for evaluation.
Sarakolé	Sarakolé is another name for the Soninké.
Saturation point	The guiding principle affecting sample size in qualitative research should be the concept of saturation, or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data.
Senegal River	The Senegal River was demarcated by the French colonial authorities as the border between Mauritania and Senegal. It is not an ethnic divide as related black African families, clans and community groupings of Wolof, Soninké, Peulh, Bambara and other lesser tribes inhabit both sides of the fertile river valley.
Senegal River	A 1,790 km long river, the headwaters and lower portion forms the southern border of Mauritania with Senegal.
Senegal River Valley	The Senegal River has a drainage basin of 270,000 sq km with fertile river flats on either bank. The French colonial power demarcated the river as the border between Senegal and Mauritania, insensitive to the familial link between inhabitants on either banks of the river.
Serer or Seré	The Serer people live principally in the west-central part of Senegal but are also found in small numbers in the Gorgol and Guidimakla regions of Mauritania which also have large numbers of Soninké to whom they are related. Some notable Serer include Leopold Sedar Senghor and Abdou Diouf (first and second president of Senegal respectively).

SHELL	Royal Dutch Shell plc, commonly known as 'Shell' is an Anglo-Dutch multinational vertically integrated oil and gas corporation, the second largest company in the world in terms of revenue and one of the six oil and gas supermajors.
Smacides	The Smacides are a "grand nomad" Maure tribe originally inhabiting the region of Atar in northern Mauritania. It was originally a warrior tribe, converted to hold stronger Islamic faith. It "dropped the Sword for the Book" and is now regarded as a maraboutic tribe. Its most noted member is Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, president of the country between 1984 and 2005. Since the ascent of Taya to the Presidency, many Smacides have retained government posts of influence and prestige in the Mauritanian bureaucracy.
'Small' nomads	"Small" nomads are so named by the Maures, because of the quasi-sedentary habits their forebears held prior to the great drought of the late 1960s and 1970s. They principally inhabited the Trarza and Brakna regions and were generally light-skinned people descendants of Berber ancestors, intermixed with Arab and some black Africans.
Social fault lines	Societies in all countries are split by major divisions or 'fault lines' caused by differences in race, religion, ethnicity, wealth, class or power. Some are plainly evident, whereas others are more concealed and may have a long gestation period, eventually erupting in conflict with little warning.
Soninké	The Soninké (also called Sarakolé or Serer) are a Mandé people who descend from the black African inhabitants that peopled the Sahara region prior to desertification and the arrival of Berber and Arabs into the region. They are closely related to the Imraguen of coastal Mauritania. They were among the first ethnic groups from Sub-Saharan West Africa to embrace Islam. They speak a Mandé language and predominantly live in the Guidimakla region of southernmost-central Mauritania.

State	This is taken in its Westphalian meaning, a western concept conjuring up the concept of sovereignty over demarcated territory, with no role for foreigners in institutions of state or other public structures, and the ability for dedicated persons to act for the state within the international system.
Supertribe	Another word used for 'Qabila'.
TEXACO	TEXACO began as the Texas Fuel Company, founded in 1901 on the discovery of oil at Spindletop. TEXACO has now merged with Chevron.
The 1885 Treaty of Berlin	The Berlin Conference of 1884–85, also referred to as the "Congo Conference" or West Africa Conference, was called to establish guiding rules and regulations for systematic European colonisation and trade in Africa. It was called for by the King of Portugal and organised by Otto von Bismarck, first Chancellor of Germany, and coincided with his country's sudden emergence as an imperial power through his able leadership. The outcome, the General Act of the Berlin Conference, was the formalisation of the scramble for Africa. Its most significant result was the annexation of Congo by King Leopold of Belgium. Its achievements, in the closing words of Otto von Bismarck, were; Free access to Africa's interior for all Western nations, free trade in the Congo Basin and consideration for the welfare of the 'native races' in providing them with the benefits of 'civilisation'. The conference set the rules for trade, navigation and control of a partitioned "Dark Continent" in order to avoid conflict among the colonising European nations. Later the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury noted that "we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where they were" (Adebajo 2010, 16).
Total	Total S.A. is a French multinational integrated oil and gas company and one of the six "Supermajors" oil companies in the world. Its businesses cover the entire oil and gas chain, from crude oil and natural gas exploration and production to power generation, transportation,

	refining, petroleum product marketing, and international crude oil and product trading. Previously centred on oil exploration and production in the Maghreb, the Atlantic coast of Africa and Indonesia, Total has in the last decade expanded into eastern and southern Africa and beyond the traditional French 'pre carré'.
Trarza	Trarza is a region in southwest Mauritania. Its capital is Rosso. Other major cities and towns include Mederdra and Boutilimit, in the region where Moktar Ould Daddah's tribe, the Oualad Béiri, originally were camped. The Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, and the capital district are geographically part of the region.
Tribe	Used in the sense that Bidân themselves use the word; it means a group within the segmented society of Arab-Berbers, claiming descent from a common ancestor. The Bidân adage applies, "Me against my brother, my brother and I against my cousin and all of us against the outsider enemy" within a political unit. Tribes are social units of several hundred to thousands of individuals who are bonded socially, appoint a leader, can make war, and in the modern urban setting influence business and government affairs.
Tullow Oil plc	TULLOW is a multinational oil and gas exploration company with its headquarters in London, United Kingdom. It has interests in over 150 licenses across 25 countries with 67 producing fields and in 2012 produced on average 79,200 barrels of oil equivalent per day. Its largest activities are in Africa and the Atlantic Margins, where it has discovered new oil provinces in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and French Guiana. Tullow has a primary listing on the London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index. It had a market capitalisation of approximately £11.1 billion as of 3 April 2013, and a reserves and resources of 1.2 billion barrels of oil equivalent.

Western Sahara, Western Sahara War

Western Sahara or Spanish Sahara is a disputed territory in North Africa. Its surface area amounts to 266,000 sq km. The population was estimated at just over 500,000, principally of Maure descent, although since Moroccan annexation many Moroccans have settled there. Occupied by Spain since the late 19th century, in 1965 the UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Western Sahara, asking Spain to decolonise the territory. In 1975, Spain relinquished the administrative control of the territory to a joint administration by Morocco and Mauritania, both having laid claim to it since 1957. The Western Sahara War erupted between those countries and the Sahrawi national liberation movement, the Polisario Front, proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Mauritania withdrew in 1979, and Morocco secured effective control of most of the territory, including all the major cities and its now-apparent natural resources. Since a United Nations-sponsored ceasefire agreement in 1991, most of the territory (including the entire Atlantic coastline) has been controlled by Morocco and the remainder by the SADR, strongly backed by Algeria. The Polisario Front has won formal recognition for SADR from many states, and extended membership of the AU, although recognitions have been extended and withdrawn according to changing international trends.

Westphalian state

Westphalian sovereignty is the concept of the sovereignty of nation-states on their territory, with no role for external agents in domestic structures. The concept of a Westphalian system refers to the Peace of Westphalia signed in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War. In this war, the major European countries at the time (the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, France, Sweden and the Dutch Republic) agreed to respect the principle of territorial integrity. In the Westphalian system, the national interests and goals of states were widely assumed to go beyond those of any citizen or any ruler. States became the primary institutional agents in an interstate system of relations. The Peace of Westphalia is said to have ended attempts to

	impose supranational authority on European states, most especially from the Church.
Windfall revenues	These are unhabitually large revenues earned by a government through production sharing, and/or through taxes and royalties, as a result of the newly established petroleum industry.
Wolof	The Wolof group is the single largest ethnic group of Senegal principally inhabiting its northwestern coastal region, The Gambia and Southwestern Mauritania. Their origin as a recognisable and organised ethnic entity dates to around the 12th or 13th century. Their principal occupation today is fishing.
Woodside	Woodside Petroleum Limited is Australia's largest petroleum exploration and production company. It is a public company listed on the ASX, headquartered in Perth, Western Australia. Its share price rose from some AUD 9 to AUD 60 during its first period of overseas expansion, 1996 - 2006.
Worldview	The overall perspective from which an individual sees and interprets the world, shaped by the beliefs and culture held and resulting from being part of a larger community.
Zawiya	The word is often used as a synonym to Marabout. It is also used to signify a certain type of "Maraboutic" or religious tribe of Berber origin. The traditional pre-colonial Maure society was stratified into several tribal castes, with the Beni Hassan warrior tribes ruling and extracting tribute from the subjugated and subservient or tributary Berber tribes. A middle caste was formed by the Zawiya, or tribes that "took up the book" and became the bearers of religion, providing religious teaching and services. The "smaller", lighter skinned Berber nomads from the more fertile Brakna and Trarza regions were most suited to this practice and many strong and lasting religious Madrasa or school became established in this region of Mauritania. On the death of the founder of a maraboutic school, their graves would turn into holy places of significance to the tribe.

Zeidane Ould H'Meida	A brilliant engineer, Zeidane Ould H'Meida, was General Manager of the iron ore company at Zouérat when he was appointed Minister of Industry, Mines and Petroleum by President Taya in late 2001. He retained his position as minister for a few months after Taya's overthrow. However, he was accused of treason and embezzlement for his involvement in the "Woodside Affair". He was released a few months later on Woodside intervention and settlement of the disagreement.
Znaga (or Senaga)	Znaga, Senaga or Sanhadja were one of the largest Berber tribal confederations subjugated by the Arab tribes who displaced many towards the river to the South, from which the name "Senegal" River.
Zouérat	Zouérat is the largest town in northern Mauritania and the capital of Tiris Zemmour region, with an approximate population of 38,000 (2005). It lies at the eastern end of the Mauritania Railway that takes iron ore in trains of up to 3 km long to the deep-water port of Nouadhibou. The town is a centre for iron ore mining, including the mines of Fderîck, Tazadit and Rouessa. Iron ore deposits were first discovered near Kediet ej Jill in 1952 and in 1958 concessions on iron extraction were given to MIFERMA (Société des mines de fer de Mauritanie), which was dominated by European-based mining companies. In 1974, the MIFERMA was nationalised by the Mauritanian government, which formed SNIM to manage the operations in its place. Between 12 and 14 million tonnes a year, have been mined since the 1970s, but production is planned to increase to 44 million tonnes a year by 2017. Reserves are estimated at between 200 and 300 million tonnes of recoverable iron ore. Other major companies exploring for iron ore in the region include Xstrata, Arcelor Mittal, Boumi and Charter Pacific Corporation Limited.

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Online documentation:

Between 2009 and 2012, a regular, and at times daily, watch was kept on certain Mauritanian and international information websites. These included:

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/africa/>; BBC African news, generally considered by the western audience it captures, as a relatively unbiased international news channel which still (necessarily) uses an outsider's outlook towards events on the African continent and in reporting on Mauritania.
- <http://www.quotidien-nouakchott.com/>; "independent" Mauritanian online news outlet, affiliated with the daily newspaper sold in the streets of Nouakchott and other major cities. The independence of this news outlet is somewhat questionable as it appears pro-government and believed to be funded by the wealthy members of certain influential tribes, including and especially the Oualad Bousba, to which the present head of state, President Abdel Aziz belongs.
- <http://www.cridem.org/>; an independent self-funded online news website that is dedicated to exposing problems and trouble spots in Mauritania. It is also owned and operated by Bidân businessmen and often gives an interpretation to national and international events and situations that have strong political content and a particular agenda in maintaining their socio-economic and political dominance.
- [http://www. Tempsforts.net/](http://www.Tempsforts.net/): an anti-government news and socio-political commentary website operated from outside the country by Haratin. It is a media vehicle where sensitive subjects such as slavery, racism, socio-political instability, and crime and corruption are openly discussed in a very direct manner critical of the Bidân government.

Background and current news information, relevant to the subjects discussed in this study, was gathered from these websites and used with discretion in the analysis of the socio-political events of the period examined.

Participants

These named and anonymous participants contributed though formal, recorded and transcribed interviews used as reference in this research. Many hours of additional discussion on Mauritania were spent with Ly Ciré, M'Boye Ould Arafa, Professor Pierre Bonte, Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody, as well as with the staff of Hotel Marhaba where I stayed during my visits to Nouakchott.

1. Sidaty Fall; five interviews, Nouakchott, 4/4/11 and 13/4/11
2. Toutane Diakité; one interview, Nouakchott, 4/4/11
3. Amadou N'daye; one interview, Nouakchott, 4/4/11
4. Dada Ould Mohamed Lamine; two interviews, Nouakchott, 4/4/11
5. Anonymous; three interviews, Nouakchott, 4/4/11
6. Fatimatou Doudou Diop; one interview, Nouakchott, 5/4/11
7. Ciré Ly; thirteen interviews, Nouakchott, 6/4/11 5/5/11
8. Habib Adaya Ould Jiddou; three interviews, Nouakchott, 6/4/11 to 10/4/11
9. Anonymous; four interviews, Nouakchott, 7/4/11 to 14/4/11
10. Maimouna Diallo; one interview, Nouakchott, 7/4/11
11. Gaye Silly Soumaré; three interviews, Nouakchott, 7/4/11 to 13/4/11
12. Abidine; two interviews, Nouakchott, 8/4/11
13. Ely Ould Sneiba; one interview, Nouakchott, 10/4/11
14. Ibrahim Mangane; one interview, Nouakchott, 10/4/11
15. Mariam M'Bow; one interview, Nouakchott, 10/4/11
16. Anonymous; two interviews, Nouakchott, 11/4/11
17. Mohamed Traoré; one interview, Nouakchott, 13/4/11
18. Ahmed Ould Cheikh; one interview, Nouakchott, 13/4/11
19. Souleymane Niang; two interviews, Nouakchott, 14/4/11 to 15/4/11
20. Ali Lamine Diallo; one interview, Nouakchott, 15/4/11
21. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 15/4/11
22. Isselmou Mohamed Lemine; one interview, 1 Nouakchott, 6/4/11
23. Boubacar Alpha Athié; two interviews, Nouakchott, 16/4/11
24. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 16/4/11
25. Sidi Mohamed Ould Lemine; one interview, Nouakchott, 18/4/11

26. Dia Amadou; one interview, Nouakchott, 19/4/11
27. Mohamed Faoud Barrada; one interview, Nouakchott, 19/4/11
28. M'Boye Ould Arafa; ten interviews, Nouakchott, 20/4/11 to 16/11/11
29. Mohamed Ba Abdouh Moussa; one interview, Nouakchott, 20/4/11
30. Hamadi Ould Mohamed Hamadi; one interview, Nouakchott, 21/4/11
31. Coulibaly Ali; one interview, Nouakchott, 21/4/11
32. Mohamed fall Ould Bah; one interview, Nouakchott, 13/12/11
33. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 4/12/11
34. Professor Emeritus Pierre Bonte; one interview, Nouakchott, 5/12/11
35. Zacharia Ould Ahmed Salem; one interview, Nouakchott, 11/12/11
36. Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody; three interviews, Nouakchott, 13 to 23/12/11
37. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 14/12/11
38. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 20/12/11
39. Anonymous; one interview, Nouakchott, 21/12/11
40. Mohamed Sidina Ould Khabuz; three interviews, Nouakchott, 22 to 2/01/12
41. Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall; two interviews, Nouakchott, 23/12/11
42. Anonymous; two interviews, Nouakchott, 24/12/11
43. Mohamed Lemine Dahi; three interviews, Nouakchott, 24 to 31/12/11
44. Abdou Salam Tabane; one interview, Nouakchott, 24/12/11
45. Mohamed Ould Elabed; one interview, Nouakchott, 26/12/11
46. Anonymous; three interviews, Nouakchott, 27/12/11 to 31/12/11
47. Mahfoud Ould Bettah; two interviews, Nouakchott, 29/12/11
48. Isselmou Ould Abdelkader; one interview, Nouakchott, 1/01/12
49. Mohamed El Hacen Ould Lebatt; one interview, Nouakchott, 2/01/12
50. Mohamed Lemine Abdallah; two interviews, Nouakchott, 2/01/12
51. Agu Kantsler; one interview, Perth, 30/01/12
52. Ex-Woodside International Manager; one interview, Perth, 3/02/12
53. Ex-Woodside Mauritania Country Manager; one interview, Denmark, 3/02/12

Photo Gallery

Photo 1



One of the main streets of Nouakchott. The camels have been tethered there for while, as evidenced by the wheel ruts. Note the high walls around each Bidân house

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Photo 2



Edge of the Taoudeni Basin with nomad's tent in the foreground

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Photo 3



MTBoye Ould Arafa, ex-President ElyMohamed Vall and the researcher at the ex-President's home (Interview 41A, 23 December, 2011)

Photo 4



Amadou Dia, hotel accountant,(Participant 26) interviewed in private by the hotel pool (interview 26A, 19 April, 2011)

Photo 5



Hartani night-watchman Abdou Salam Ould Tabane
(Interview 44A, 24 December 2011)

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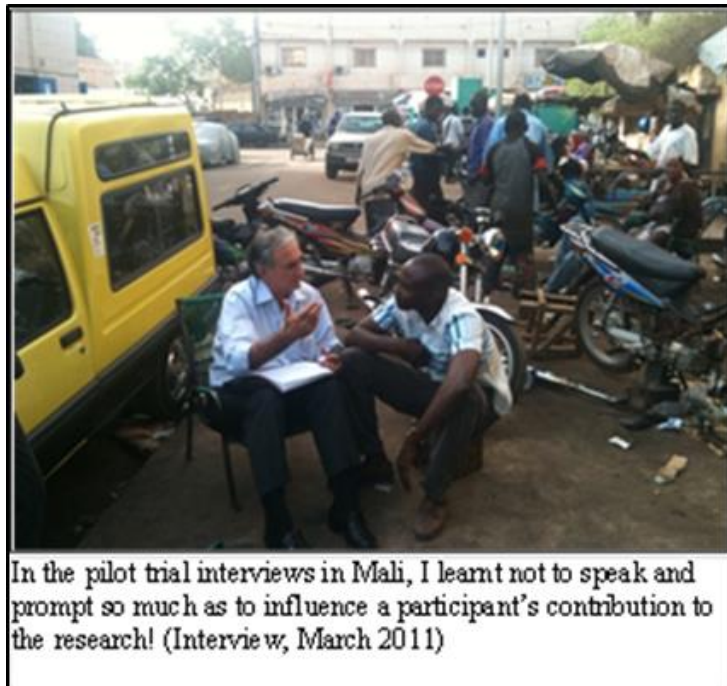
Photo 6



Pilot study trial interview with a very learned, young Malian
lawyer in an environment very unfamiliar to most West
Australians (Interview, March 2011)

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Photo 7



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Photo 8



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Photo 9



"25 Février" Activist Mohamed Lemine Ould Abdallah in his shop explaining his 12-year exile in Italy (Interview 50, 2 January 2012)

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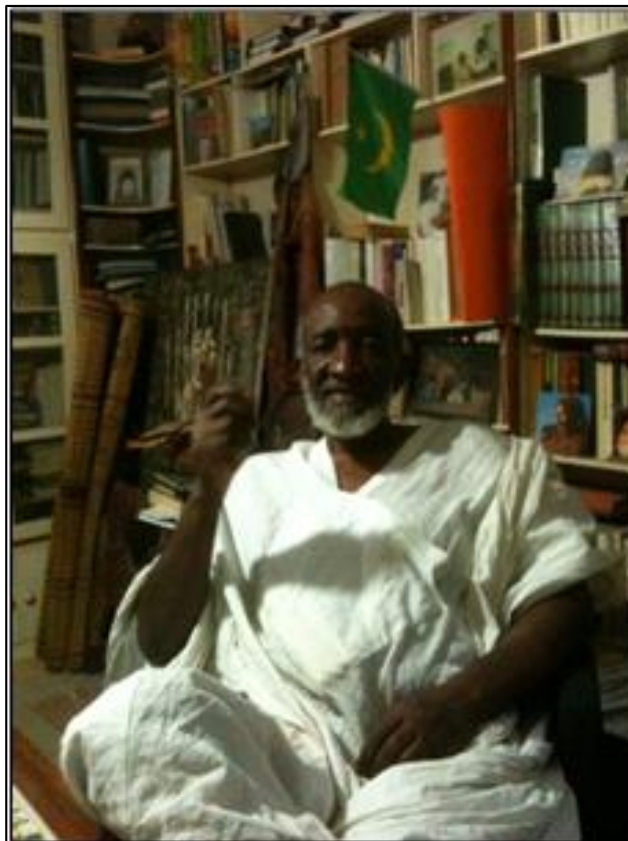
Photo 10



A trial group interview with Malian taxi drivers in Bamako. The technique did not work well (Interview, March 2011)

Page 45

Photo 11



Ex-Senator Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody in his study (interview 36A, 13 December 2011)

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Photo 12



Bidân next to his desert tent, now used as a home away from home for weekend retreats

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Photo 13



Hartani women wet-nurse to a Bidân child (Photo retrieved 4 February 2013 from Google image library)

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Photo 14



Hartani driver to wealthy the Bidân above

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Photo 15



June 1957, first government council in a tent at the site of the selected capital for the future country, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Note the preponderance of “white” Maures. Far left is the French governor for the “country of the Maures”, Governor Mouragues, also president of this council.
(Downloaded from Google images 4 February 2013, courtesy of www.skyscrapercity.com)

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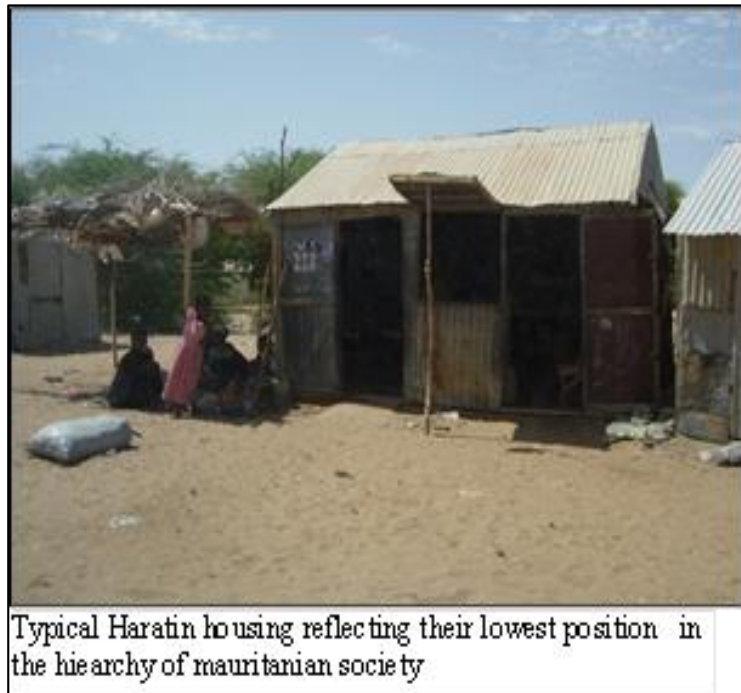
Photo 16



June 1961, a very young President Moktar Ould Daddah (Downloaded from Google images 4 February 2013, courtesy of www.rfi.fr)

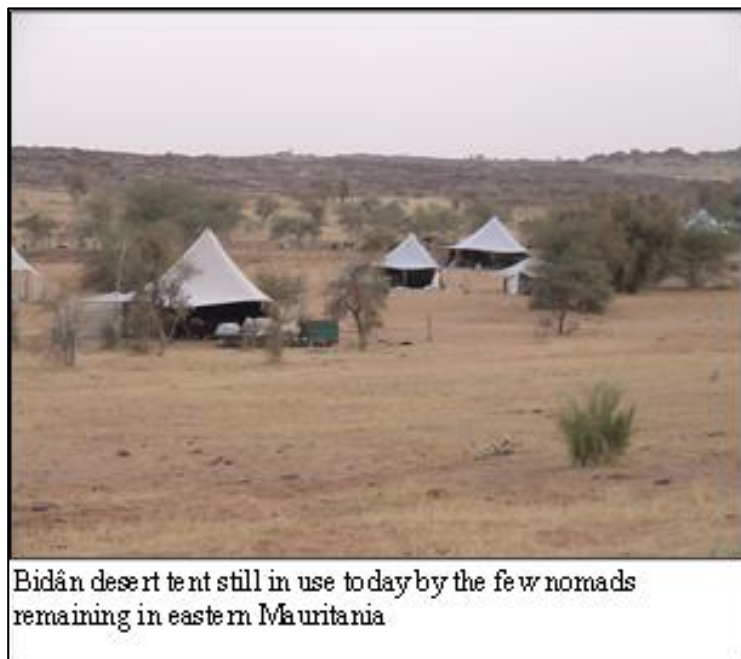
Page 81

Photo 17



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Photo 18



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Photo 19



Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah, head of state between 4 January 1980 and 12 December 1984, when he was deposed by Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya. Haidallah, a Bidán born in north-western Mauritania, had strong affinities and made peace with the Sahrawi people, thus withdrawing from the Western Sahara conflict.

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Photo 20



Colonel Maaouya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya was Head of state between 12 December 1984 to 3 August 2005. He was deposed by General Ely (Ould) Mohamed Vall on 3 August 2005

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Appendix 1 - Field Questionnaire for Field Interview

Below is the interview preamble given, in French where applicable, to all participants followed by the full list of questions likely to be asked of any one participant.

The questions were selected according to the perceived level of comprehension of the participant and adjusted to the interview as thought fit at the time. Rarely were all questions asked of anyone participant, once confidence was gained after the trial period in Bamako, Mali.

INTERVIEWS PREAMBLE - given to participants prior to all interviews

(In the field, all discussions and written material were in French)

Once you have read the “Research information sheet” and we have completed the “Consent form” and the “Participant details form”. The interview I will conduct with you uses a question/answer format as well as, if we get to that, a more informal approach that will consist of a conversation on certain specific topics that you chose and allow me to cover.

My key aim in the interview is to create a comfortable, informal conversational space in which you will tell me ‘stories’ and reflect on your experiences, bringing out your own personal way of seeing situations and events that evolved in your country since 2001.

The questions I will ask you are open-ended and designed to initiate and stimulate conversation. The conversations will be about your particular experiences, feelings and observations and the inferences you draw from these observations. They are selected and presented in a manner appropriate to the context of the interview, the situation at hand, and to your level of involvement in the society, the politics and economic activity related to the natural resources industry. Some of the questions I have here are examples of the type of question I will put to you, not all will be asked. They deal with sensitive issues relating to the particular period during which the petroleum industry established itself in your country, as well as prior to that, if we agree that some past events or situations are relevant to what is happening today.

You may or may not require guidance from me in the interviews, as some people need more support to guide them through talking about the relevant aspects of their experiences.

As indicated in the accompanying information sheet, you are under no obligation to answer any particular questions, if you are uncomfortable.

My priorities are to evaluate the social, economic and political roles of certain formal and informal groups within the community. I am particularly interested in changes over the period since 2001 to so as to evaluate if there is a correlation between the establishment of a petroleum industry and changes in the social and political aspects of Mauritania, especially in the emergence of coup d'états. I will also ask questions covering institutions such as corruption, poverty, elites, the various coups (2003, 2005, 2008, 2009), and about specific politicians. Again, you are not required to answer any question if you do not wish to do so.

I will be gathering and analysing all this qualitative and quantitative data, to try to find the root cause - or the multiple causes - for particular undesirable situations we discuss and that affect Mauritania.

God willing, my work with you may bring peace and happiness to the country.

Discussion on social issues, society & the future

Are you happy with your life now?

How will the future be different for you?

How do you see the lives of children growing up today, to be different to yours?

Are those issues important to you now?

Tell me about your experiences and your family's experience since the discovery of (Iron ore or petroleum in Mauritania and gold in Mali)?

Tell me about your knowledge of the iron ore industry in Northern Mauritania? Petroleum offshore Mauritania? Gold in Mali?

Do you think iron ore has helped improve the standard of living of the population since its discovery in the early 1970s and exploitation since? Will the oil industry do the same? Has gold in Mali?

What problems or challenges do you think that the various natural resources industries (iron and petroleum for Mauritania and gold for Mali) have brought to the country?

What opportunities or rewards do you think that the various natural resources industries have brought to your country?

Do you think that your society has gained or lost through this new activity?

What role do you think that the natural resources industries (iron, gold, petroleum) have played in the social changes in your country since 2001?

Are social bonds within the tribal and ethnic groups strong or weak?

Is there trust and confidence between tribal groups? Between ethnic groups?

Is there trust and confidence between the citizens and the government?

In what way has the general population gained from the establishment of natural resources industries in their country?

What did the natural resources industries (whether gold, iron ore or petroleum) bring to you in particular? Has it brought material, lifestyle or spiritual benefits?

Do you have a story that you would like to share that brings out your experience with the establishment of a particular natural resource industry in your country?

Do you think that your social background (ethnicity or tribal group) has played a role in your allocation of the social position you fill in life?

Do you think that your social background (ethnicity or tribal group) has played a role in other factors that come into your live?

Issues of importance that you may wish to discuss;

- Is education an important issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is health an important issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is poverty reduction an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is the government doing enough? Why?
- Is economic development an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is improved infrastructure (road, communication) an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is a better quality of life an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
Is the Human Development Index an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is Foreign assistance an issue for you? Should it be for the community?
- Is National security an issue for you? Should it be for the community?
- Is water supply and distribution an issue to you? Should it be for the community?
- Is electricity an issue for you? Should it be for the community?
- Is slavery an issue for you? Should it be for the community?

Would you like to comment on?

- Electricity? Supply? Petronas and development of offshore gas reserves?
- Public works? Transport and communication?
- Water availability and supply?
Agriculture?
- Forestry and fisheries?
- Labour and community?
- Youth?
- Ethnicity? Tribalism?
- The 2003 coup attempt?
- The 2005 Coup and the First Junta?
- Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall?
- The 2007 democratic elections?
- The 2008 Putsch and the Second Junta?
- President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz?
- The 2009 democratic Elections?
- 2010 to 2011?
- The future?

Discussion on the impact of Natural Resources (NR)

What problems or challenges do you think that the petroleum industry has brought to Mauritania?

Tell me about your experience and your family's experience since the discovery of petroleum in Mauritania in 2001?

What role do you think that the natural resources industries (iron, gold, petroleum) have played in the economic changes in your country since 2001?

Do you think that the natural resources of the country and their revenues are well managed by the Government?

If you were responsible for these industries in your country, how would you manage the industries? How would you manage the revenues?

How would you use these revenues to create your vision of the future?

Would you like to discuss the Government's budget allocation?

Would like to discuss how the government handles revenue funds that come in from the exploitation of Natural Resources? Withdrawals and use of the revenues from natural resources? Investment of the revenues from natural resources?

Should there be a plan for the optimised exploitation of gold? Petroleum? Iron ore? For the greatest revenue as quickly as possible? For future generations?

Would you like to discuss the government Budget and funds allocation?

Should NR revenues be saved at all? Some? All?

Should NR revenues be spent on agriculture? Should we build barriers to imports?

Should NR revenues be spent on manufacturing? Should we build barriers to imports?

Would it enhance employment / jobs for locals to any extent?

Should NR revenue be used to develop small local business opportunities for locals?

Overall, do you think that the government manages the economy well?

In what ways have politicians and the military used the nation's oil revenues since 2001?

How have they allocated oil revenues?

In what ways have the general population gained from the petroleum industry?

Do you think that Mauritania has the appropriate accountability and transparency mechanisms in place to ensure effective government?

Which groups and communities in Mauritania does the government have to take account of in formulating policies? Making laws? Allocating budget? Infrastructure expenditure?

Discussion on political issues

What do you think of your country's formal institutions? The government? The police? The army?

What do you think of your country's informal institutions? The tribal system? The ethnic divide? Trust? Confidence? Honesty? Sense of belonging?

Can you describe the decision-making process in place?

Can you describe the decision-making process you would use?

Do you have trust in this process?

Do you have confidence in the people that carry it out?

What are the strengths of these people?

What are their weaknesses?

Will the country fall victim to the Resource curse?

Do you think that the overthrow of the Taya government was related to the development of Chinguetti oilfield?

How do you think the first military junta handled the presence of the Australian company, Woodside, on Mauritanian soil?

What role did the petroleum industry play in the creation of the second military junta?

Do you think that a person's social background plays a role in the allocation of high-level administrative and political positions?

Would you like to comment on?

- Ethnicity? Tribalism?
- Foreign intervention? US? France? Russia? China? Others?
- Al Qaeda?
- Local government?

- Defence?
- Fisheries protection?
- Corruption?
- Woodside?
- Petronas?
- Foreign oil and mining explorers?
- The future?

Social character of the country

Is there an ethnic divide in the country?

Has it and will it affect development of successful natural resources industries?

Is there a tribal divide in the country?

Has it and will it affect development of successful natural resources industries?

Is there an elite class, and is the gap between rich and poor increasing or decreasing?

Inchallah

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire presented to Woodside

This list of simple questions was authorised by Woodside's legal department. It was returned by email with no cover note, with answers which were very brief and devoid of any substance and several questions left unanswered, with a 'N/A'. The explanation later given – verbally - was that Woodside personnel had been put under much stress in the course of the federal police inquiry and were unwilling to discuss the matter any further.

List of questions requested by Woodside Petroleum Limited's Legal Department in lieu of face-to-face interviews with Woodside personnel involved with the Mauritanian project

1. Would you give a brief on why Woodside involved itself in the development of Mauritania's offshore reserves?
2. What did the 2001 discovery of Chinguetti mean to Woodside? What do you think it meant for the Mauritaniens?
3. What was the general mood of Woodside at the time? Of the government? Of Mauritaniens, especially that worked for Woodside?
4. Do you think that the discovery was good for Mauritania? Was it good for Woodside?
5. What is the "character" of the Maure? Easy to get along? Difficult? Of blacks versus Maures?
6. How was the stability of the country perceived 2001-2003, 2003-2005, post 2005?
7. What did Woodside make of the coup in 2003? Do you think it was induced by a grab for power with the coming petroleum revenues?
8. Was there pressure from the Taya government to bring development on quickly?
9. What was argues about the PSC terms that Woodside changed and that the 2005 Junta so rejected?

10. Did the Mauritania's grievances really were as enumerated in the public statement that was circulated to all embassies, including the Malian embassy in Japan to which I am responsible as Honorary Consul for Mali in Perth?
11. February 6, 2006, three weeks before first oil, the government issued that press statement. How did Woodside react? Did Woodside repudiate the claims? How? Why? What was offered and how was it handled?
12. Would you claim Senator Milne was "off the track"? Maybe this is a chance to repudiate some of the untruths said about Woodside and its overseas employees?
13. Is there a link between the grab for power (i.e. Coups and government overthrows) in Mauritania and the beginnings of the oil industry in that country?
14. Are there lessons to be learned in this series of potentially related events and circumstances? For investors? For a foreign operator? For the country?

Appendix 3 – Requests / authorisations for research in Mali and Mauritania

Letters of introduction from Dr Bob Pokrant, principal research supervisor at Curtin University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Social Science and International Studies, together with formal letters of authorisation for the research from the Ministers of Energy in Mali, where the trial interviews were conducted, and Mauritania, where the principal research was carried out in 2011 and 2012

His Excellency, the Minister of Energy and Petroleum
Wame Ibrahim Lamine
Ministry of Energy and Petroleum
Nouakchott
Islamic Republic of Mauritania
seminib@mauritania.fr

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Perth Western Australia 6845
Telephone: +61 8 9326 6131
Facsimile: +61 8 9326 3155
Email: enquiries@curtin.edu.au
Web: www.curtin.edu.au
CRICOS Provider Code 00301J

3.11.10

Dear Minister

I am the academic supervisor of Mr. Max de Vieri who is seeking permission to carry out research in Mauritania as part of his doctoral program at Curtin University. As you know Mr. de Vieri personally as well as his strong interest in the development of Mauritania, I would appreciate it if you could facilitate his obtaining official permission from your Ministry to carry out his research. The title of his thesis is: The petroleum industry and socio-economic change in Mali and Mauritania.

In order to carry out his research, Curtin University requires that he obtain ethics clearance from the University, which includes official permission from the Mauritanian Government to do the research. It would be most helpful if I could receive your reply at your earliest convenience.

Mr. de Vieri will receive some in-kind funding from mining companies operating in your country.

If you require any further detail about the nature of Mr. de Vieri's research, please let me know.

Yours sincerely



Dr. Bob Pokrant
Professor of Anthropology
School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages
Faculty of Humanities
Curtin University of Technology
GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845, WA, Australia
Tel: +6189266 3326, Fax: +6189266 3165
Mobile: 0407191827; Email: B.Pokrant@curtin.edu.au
CRICOS provider code 00301J

His Excellency, the Minister of Mines
Abou-Bacar Traore
Ministry of Mines
Bamako
Mali
abtgogo@gmail.com

GPO Box U1957
Perth Western Australia 6845
Telephone: +61 8 0098 7181
Fax: +61 8 0098 7166
Email: enquiries@curtin.edu.au
Web: curtin.edu.au
CRICOS provider code 00301

27.10.10

Dear Minister

I am the academic supervisor of Mr. Max de Vietri who is seeking permission to carry out research in Mali as part of his doctoral program at Curtin University. As you know Mr. de Vietri personally as well as his strong interest in the development of Mali, I would appreciate it if you could facilitate his obtaining official permission from your Ministry to carry out his research. The title of his thesis is: The petroleum industry and socio-economic change in Mali and Mauritania.

In order to carry out his research, Curtin University requires that he obtain ethics clearance from the University, which includes official permission from the Malian Government to do the research. It would be most helpful if I could receive your reply at your earliest convenience.

Mr. de Vietri will receive some modest funding from mining companies operating in your country.

If you require any further detail about the nature of Mr. de Vietri's research, please let me know.

Yours sincerely



Dr. Bob Pokrant
Professor of Anthropology
School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages
Faculty of Humanities
Curtin University of Technology
GPO Box U1957, Perth, 6845, WA, Australia
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MINISTÈRE DES MINES
SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL

REPUBLIQUE DU MALI
Un Peuple - Un But - Une Foi



CONFIDENTIEL

Bamako, le 05 NOV 2010
Le Ministre des Mines

N° 0167 M.M - SG

Monsieur MAX DE VIETRI
Chercheur, Université Curtin, Australia

Objet : Recherche doctorale à l'Université Curtin sur l'industrie extractive du Mali

En faisant suite à nos différents échanges concernant le projet de recherche doctorale sur l'industrie extractive au Mali que vous envisagez d'entreprendre en collaboration avec l'Université Curtin d'Australie, j'ai l'honneur de confirmer mon accord de principe pour la réalisation d'une telle recherche dont les résultats pourront contribuer à enrichir la connaissance de l'industrie minière de notre pays.

Tout en vous reaffirmant l'intérêt de mon département pour une telle recherche, nous restons à votre entière disposition pour vous faciliter la collecte documentaire et les enquêtes de terrain que vous serez amené à réaliser au Mali.

Je vous prie de croire à l'expression de ma parfaite considération.



Abou Bakar TRAORE

Chargé de l'Ordre National

Copie :

- Université Curtin West Australia
- Ministère des Enseignements Supérieurs et de la recherche Scientifique (Bamako/Mali)

Tél: (223) 20 23 31 91 / Fax: 20 22 36 45 BP: 1909

الجمهورية الإسلامية الموريتانية
Honneur – Fraternité – Justice

Ministère du Pétrole de
l'Energie et des Mines



الجمهورية الإسلامية الموريتانية
شرف – إخاء – عدل

وزارة النفط والطاقة والمعادن

N° 00000488 /M.P.E.M/M B

Nouakchott 18 APR. 2011

Le Ministre الوزير

A Monsieur MAX DE VIETRI

Chercheur à l'Université de Curtin, Australie

Objet : Etudes de Recherche doctorale à l'Université de Curtin

Référence : lettre du Dr. Bob Pokrant, Professeur d'Anthropologie, Université de Curtin, Australie.

Suite à la lettre ci-dessus référencée, relative aux études de recherche doctorale que vous envisagez d'entreprendre en collaboration avec l'Université de Curtin d'Australie, j'ai l'honneur de vous notifier notre accord de principe pour la réalisation desdites études portant sur « Industrie Pétrolière en Mauritanie et impact socio-économique ».

Vous en souhaitant bonne réception, veuillez agréer l'expression de mes salutations.

TALEB ABDIVALL



BP. 4921 - Tél: 00 222 45 25 30 83 - Fax: 45 25 36 76 - Nouakchott - Mauritanie

Appendix 4 – Participants’ fact sheet and questionnaire

As the research involved recording personal information, Ethical Approval of Research Involving Humans (Form A) HR 132/2010 was awarded to cover this research the project was explained at the beginning of all interview with new participants and some fifteen minutes was spent completing the two forms below. This allowed for setting a relaxed atmosphere to the interviews and allowing an easier flow of information exchange.



Research Project: The Oil industry and socio-political change in Mauritania
Researcher: Max de Vietri

Date : 201...

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction and Purpose Research: My name is Max de Vietri, I am undertaking a research doctorate at Curtin University in Western Australia. After a long association with Mauritania, I am interested in understanding the impact of oil on Mauritanian society and economy. I will be interviewing a representative section of the population including government officials, business people, workers and foreigners involved in the oil industry.

Consent to participate: Your participation will be in the form of an open interview, consisting of a one-hour discussion where you will be invited to speak about your experiences, feelings and recollections of events and people during the period 2001 to present, most especially relating to the establishment of the oil industry in Mauritania. There will be some specific questions I will ask concerning the establishment of the oil industry in Mauritania and your feelings concerning related events.

If you are willing to partake in this research, I would ask you to sign the consent form for interview participants.

Confidentiality: When you have signed the Consent Form, I will assume that you have agreed to participate and allowed me to use your data in this research. However, your involvement is entirely voluntary and you will not be compelled to discuss anything you feel uncomfortable with. You have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process without it affecting your rights or my responsibilities, as long as withdrawal is requested before 1 February 2013, date of the final write up of the research.

The information you will provide will be kept separate from any of your personal details that I may collect, and matching of these two sets of information will be coded in such a way that only I may have access to it. Interview data and transcripts will not have your name on it or any other identifying information. In adherence to university policy, the interview tapes, notes and transcribed information will be kept in a locked cabinet for five years before being returned to me, kept by the university or disposed of in an appropriate manner.

Further information: This research proposal has been reviewed and given approval by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval #.....). If you would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me on mobile + 61 4 1369 2739 or by email maxdevietri3@bigpond.com. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Bob Pokrant on +61 8 9266 3326 or email him on b.pokrant@curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for your involvement in this research, your participation is appreciated.

Max de Vietri
Researcher – Curtin University

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 132/2010). The committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning +61 8 9266 2784 or emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au



Projet de recherche:

L'industrie du pétrole et changement socio-politique en Mauritanie

Date: 201

FICHE D'INFORMATION POUR PARTICIPANTS

Introduction et objet de recherche: Mon nom est Max de Vietri, j'entreprends un doctorat de recherche à l'Université Curtin en Australie-Occidentale. Après une longue association avec la Mauritanie, je suis intéressé à comprendre l'impact du pétrole sur la société mauritanienne et son économie.

Je planifie interroger un échantillon représentatif de la population, y compris des représentants du gouvernement, des gens d'affaires, les travailleurs et les étrangers impliqués dans l'industrie pétrolière.

Votre consentement à participer: Votre participation sera sous la forme d'un entretien ouvert, composé d'une discussion d'une heure où vous serez invité à parler de vos expériences, sentiments et souvenirs d'événements et de personnes au cours de la période de 2001 à aujourd'hui, plus particulièrement relatif à la création de l'industrie pétrolière en Mauritanie. Il y aura des questions spécifiques que je demanderai concernant la création de l'industrie pétrolière en Mauritanie et vos sentiments sur les événements qui sont liés à l'établissement de cette industrie.

Si vous êtes prêt à participer à cette recherche, je voudrais vous demander de signer le formulaire de consentement pour participants à ces entretiens.

Confidentialité: Lorsque vous aurez signé le formulaire de consentement, je vais supposer que vous aurez aussi bien consenti de participer et me donne la permission d'utiliser les données de cette recherche. Cependant, votre participation est entièrement volontaire et vous ne serez pas obligé de discuter sur les points dont vous vous sentez mal à l'aise. Vous avez le droit de vous retirer de cette exercice à n'importe quel stade du processus sans que cela n'affecte vos droits ou mes responsabilités, tant que le retrait est demandé avant le 1er Février 2013, date de la rédaction finale de mes recherches en Afrique.

Les informations que vous fournissez seront séparées de données personnelles que je recueillerai, et la congruence de ces deux ensembles de données seront codés de telle sorte que je resterai le seul à y avoir accès. Les données d'entrevue et les transcriptions ne seront pas codées directement à votre nom ou autres informations d'identification. En respect de la politique universitaire, les enregistrements d'entrevues, les notes et les informations transcrites seront conservés dans une armoire verrouillée pendant cinq ans, détenues par l'université, après la quelle période, ils seront détruits ou retournés à moi-même.

Informations supplémentaires: Ce projet de recherche a été examiné et donné son approbation par le comité des éthiques humaines de l'Université de Curtin (Approbation #.....). Si vous souhaitez de plus amples renseignements au sujet de l'étude, n'hésitez pas à me contacter sur mon cellulaire + 61 4 1369 2739 ou par courriel à max.devietri3@bigpond.com. Alternativement, vous pouvez communiquer avec mon superviseur de recherche, le professeur Bob Pokrant sur +61 8 9266 3326 ou par courriel sur b.pokrant@curtin.edu.au.

Je vous remercie pour votre participation à cette recherche,

Max de Vietri

Doctorat en recherche – Université de Curtin, Perth, Australie occidentale

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 132/2010). If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning +61 8 9266 2784 or emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au



Research Project: The Oil industry and socio-political change in Mauritania
Researcher: Max de Vietri

Date : 201...

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANT Date: / /

Name / Surname:

Email / telephone / mobile / address for contact purpose:

I have read and/or understood the information presented on the Information Sheet and the French translation attached and have discussed this information with the researcher.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the research.

I am willing to be interviewed.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary.

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time including after this interview has finished, but before the last draft of the report has been submitted and previewed by 1 April 2013.

I am helping with your research on the understanding that my comments will be kept confidential, and my name will not be associated with my comments.

I agree to the interview being taped ☐

I prefer that the interview is not taped ☐

I fully understand that my comments will be added together with responses from other people and that this information will be used in a research report and may be used in further publications.

I agree to this on the understanding that my name or any other information that identifies me is not used.

I
I am available for further follow-up meetings ☐

I am not available for further follow-up meetings ☐

Signed

Name / surname (please print)

Date / / Witness signature

Witness name / surname

Please return this sheet to the researcher or email to max.devietri3@bigpond.com

A. Participant details Person

Name : (Optional)

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Age 18 - 29 ☐

29 - 49 ☐

50 - 59 ☐

60 - 69 ☐

70+ ☐

3. Where were you born

4. What is your tribal group?

5. Do you have children? How many?

6. Where do you currently live?

7. Have your parents lived in the same city as you do now ?

8. What languages do you speak?

9. 2006 – 2011 what work have you done?

10. 2001 – 2005 what work have you done?

11. 1996 – 2000 what work have you done?

12. Before 1996 what work have you done?

13. Are you happy with your current income?

14. Level of education;

No formal education ☐

Primary completed ☐

Secondary completed ☐

Bachelor degree ☐

Postgraduate degree ☐

Appendix 5 – Participants’ details

The 53 formal participants’ details are listed here below, principally indicating the length of time that each gave to the research effort. Many pointing out that if this project were to do well for the country’s economy and for its people; it would be a good project to achieve. Few participants asked for their names to be suppressed, even when radical anti-government propositions were voiced. When a participant asked for his or name to be suppressed, that participant was referred to as ‘Sir’ or by his first name only - usually it was ‘Mohamed’ - and the family name was struck out of all records. Few women were willing, or had the opportunity to be asked to take part in the project, but of the few that did take part, all were willing to be referred to by name, even when in one case, an emotionally disturbing event from 1989 was recounted.

In total, 105 formal interviews were completed with the 53 formal participants. All interviews were recorded for a total interview time of 135 hours and 25 minutes and consisting of 1,230,986 K bytes.

In addition to these recorded interviews, recordings of informal discussions, radio interviews and group discussions with individuals unwilling to be named or sign any documentation, were also transcribed, remaining unnamed and untitled, but included as valid information for the qualitative analysis achieved with NVivo 9.3 software .

Participant's Name	Place of interview	Number of interviews	Interview date(s)	Interviews	Time interviewed	KB size	F / M	Age	Ethnic group	Languages spoken	Education Level
Sidaty Fall	Nouakchott	5	4/04/11 to 13/04/11	01A to 01E	1 hr 25 mins	20,772,332	M	50 - 59	Haratin	5	Tertiary
Toutane Dialité	"	1	04/04/11	02A	45 mins	11,016,792	F	29 - 49	Mixed	5	Secondary
Amadou N'daye	"	1	04/04/11	03A	55 mins	12,487,312	M	29 - 49	Peulh	4	Secondary
Dada O/M. Lemine	"	2	04/04/11	04A to 04B	1hr 10 mins	16,281,880	M	29 - 49	Bidān	6	Secondary
Anonymous	"	3	04/04/11	05A to 05C	1hr 45 mins	24,189,356	M	29 - 49	Mixed	4	Primary
Fatimatou Doudou Diop	"	1	05/04/11	06A	55 mins	14,144,300	F	29 - 49	Mixed	4	Tertiary
Cire Ly	"	13	6/04/11 to 5/05/11	07A to 07M	14 hrs 15 mins	115,522,960	M	29 - 49	Peulh	5	Postgrad
Habib O/Adaya O/Jiddou	"	3	6/04/11 to 10/04/11	08A to 08C	2 hrs	29,477,164	M	29 - 49	Bidān	5	Tertiary
Anonymous	"	4	7/04/11 to 14/04/11	09A to 09D	4 hrs 25 mins	64,104,140	M	50 - 59	Mixed	4	Postgrad
Maimouna Diallo	"	1	07/04/11	10A	45 mins	9,932,852	F	50 - 59	Peulh	5	Tertiary
Gaye-Silly Soumare	"	3	7/04/11 to 13/04/11	11A to 11C	3 hrs 30 mins	53,037,320	M	70+	Sarakolé	2	Tertiary
Abidine	"	2	08/04/11	12A to 12B	1 hr 30 mins	21,828,924	0	29 - 49	Mixed	5	Secondary
Ely O/Sneiba	"	1	10/04/11	13A	1 hr 10 mins	17,056,536	M	29 - 49	Bidān	5	Postgrad
Ibrahim Mangane	"	1	10/04/11	14A	45 mins	11,257,836	M	29 - 49	Peulh	6	Secondary
Mariam M'Bow	"	1	10/04/11	15A	40 mins	9,828,248	F	29 - 49	Peulh	2	Secondary
Anonymous	"	2	11/04/11	16A to 16B	1hr 25 mins	20,814,720	M	29 - 49	Bidān	2	Tertiary
M. Traoré	"	1	13/04/11	17A	1 hr 15 mins	18,348,168	M	29 - 49	Bidān	2	Tertiary
Ahmed O/Cheikh	"	1	13/04/11	18A	25 mins	6,339,932	M	29 - 49	Bidān	2	Tertiary
Souleymane Niang	"	2	14/04/11 to 15/04/11	19A to 19B	3 hrs 50 mins	56,898,552	M	29 - 49	Peulh	5	Postgrad
Ali Lamine Diallo	"	2	15/04/11	20A to 20B	1 hr 25 mins	21,343,804	M	29 - 49	Peulh	6	Secondary
Anonymous	"	1	15/04/11	21A	1 hr 10 mins	17,544,688	M	29 - 49	Peulh	5	Secondary
Isselmou M. Lemine	"	1	16/04/11	22A	1 hr 25 mins	20,603,976	M	29 - 49	Haratin	4	Postgrad

Participant's Name	Place of interview	Number of interviews	Interview date(s)	Interviews	Time interviewed	KB size	F / M	Age	Ethnic group	Languages spoken	Education Level
Boubacar Alpha Athié	"	2	16/04/11	23A to 23B	1 hr 10 mins	16,501,700	M	29 - 49	Peulh	5	Secondary
Anonymous	"	1	16/04/11	24A	30 mins	789,856	M	29 - 49	Peulh	3	Secondary
Sidi M O/M. Lemine	"	1	18/04/11	25A	1 hr 25 mins	20,740,416	M	29 - 49	Bidân	3	Tertiary
Dia Amadou	"	1	19/04/11	26A	1 hr 15 mins	18,416,388	M	29 - 49	Peulh	6	Secondary
M. Faoud Barrada	"	1	19/04/11	27A	50 mins	12,616,172	M	29 - 49	Mixed	3	Postgrad
M'Boye O/Arafa	"	10	20/04/11 to 16/11/11	28A to 28J	4 hrs 50 mins	70,086,396	M	60 - 69	Bidân	3	Postgrad
M. Ba Abdouh Moussa	"	1	20/04/11	29A	25 mins	5,728,984	M	29 - 49	Peulh	7	Tertiary
Hamadi M. Hamadi	"	1	21/04/11	30A	1 hr 15 mins	17,544,688	M	50 - 59	Bidân	9	Postgrad
Coulibaly Aly	"	1	21/04/11	31A	50 mins	12,144,696	M	29 - 49	Mixed	5	Secondary
M. Fall O/ Bah	"	1	13/12/11	32A	1 hr	14,192,812	M	50 - 59	Bidân	4	Postgrad
Anonymous	"	1	04/12/11	33A	30 mins	7,999,952	M	18 - 29	Bidân	2	Tertiary
Pierre Bonte	"	1	05/12/11	34A	1 hr 10 mins	17,180,848	M	60 - 69	Caucasian	2	Postgrad
Zacharia O/Ahmed Salem	"	1	11/12/11	35A	1 hr 15 mins	17,546,204	M	29 - 49	Haratin	3	Postgrad
M. Said O/Hamody	"	3	13/12/11 to 23/12/11	36A to 36C	3 hrs 25 mins	49,661,188	M	70+	Haratin	3	Postgrad
Anonymous	"	1	14/12/11	37A	1 hr 25 mins	20,450,860	M	50 - 59	Peulh	4	Postgrad
Anonymous	"	1	20/12/11	38A	25 mins	6,341,448	M	50 - 59	Peulh	3	Secondary
Anonymous	"	1	21/12/11	39A	1 hr	14,154,912	F	29 - 49	Caucasian	2	Tertiary
M. Sidina O/Khabuz	"	3	22/12/11 to 2/01/12	40A to 40C	1 hr	14,221,656	M	29 - 49	Bidân	2	Tertiary
Ely Ould Mohamed Vall	"	2	23/12/11	41A to 41B	1 hr 55 mins	27,168,276	M	50 - 59	Bidân	3	Secondary
Anonymous	"	2	24/12/11	42A to 42B	3 hrs 10 mins	45,222,320	M	29 - 49	Bidân	2	Postgrad
M. Lemine Dahi	"	3	24/12/11 to 31/12/11	43A to 43C	2 hrs 25 mins	35,468,396	M	50 - 59	Bidân	3	Postgrad
Abdou Salim Tabane	"	1	24/12/11	44A	1 hr 10 mins	17,729,640	M	29 - 49	Haratin	3	Secondary

Participant's Name	Place of interview	Number of interviews	Interview date(s)	Interviews	Time interviewed	KB size	F / M	Age	Ethnic group	Languages spoken	Education Level
Mohamed O/Elabed	"	1	26/12/11	45A	1 hr 10 mins	17,802,408	M	29 - 49	Bidân	3	Postgrad
Anonymous	"	3	27/12/11 to 31/12/11	46A to 46C	1 hr 35 mins	22,938,044	M	50 - 59	Bidân	3	Postgrad
Mahfoud O/Bettah	"	2	29/12/11	47A to 47B	1 hr 5 mins	16,204,564	M	50 - 59	Bidân	2	Tertiary
Isselmou O/Abdelkader	"	1	01/01/12	48A	2 hrs 40 mins	39,150,720	M	60 - 69	Bidân	3	Postgrad
M. El Hacen O/Lebatt	"	1	02/01/12	49A	1 hr 25 mins	20,722,224	M	50 - 59	Bidân	5	Postgrad
M. Lemine Abdallah	"	2	02/01/12	50A	1 hr 35 mins	23,552,616	M	29 - 49	Bidân	3	Tertiary
Agu Kantsler - Ex-expl Director	Perth	1	30/01/12	51A	1 hr 5 mins	15,689,000	M	60 - 69	Caucasian	4	Postgrad
Woodside Intrnl Expl mgr.	Perth	1	03/02/12	52A	25 mins	6,233,000	M	50 - 59	Caucasian	3	Tertiary
Ex-Woodside in country mgr.	Denmark	1	03/02/12	53A	1 hr	13,964,000	M	60 - 69	Caucasian	1	Tertiary
	Total	105			135 hrs 25 mins	1,230,986,176					

Appendix 6 – Evidence Woodside’s US\$ 100 million entered the State budget

Copy of a report obtained from Mohamed Ould Lemine Dahi on the request of Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall. The report is entitled “Prime Minister’s summary report of the activities of the government during the “transition period”, 3 August 2005 to 5 March 2007”.

In this report on page 34, Woodside’s US 100 million is mention as having entered into the state budget. Translated the following passage reads, “On the matter of public finances, our country is favoured by a budgetary surplus which had not been anticipated at the time that the 2006 budget was adopted (an exceptional bonus of US 100 million received as repayment for a payment shortfall from the petroleum company, Woodside ;...).

NOTE: Photocopy machines were difficult to come by and copiers that worked effectively were impossible to find. This is the best copy proof I could muster for the quality of document in the first place.

22/12/11

REPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE

Harmonie - Fraternité - Justice

PREMIER MINISTRE



BILAN DE LA TRANSITION

*Rapport sur l'activité du Gouvernement
de Transition*

(3 août 2005 – 5 mars 2007)

avec une mise à jour au 23 mars 2007

mars 2007

portations ont contribué à améliorer significativement le solde du compte courant de la balance des paiements, dont le déficit a été ramené à 1,4% du PIB (35,6 Millions \$US) en 2006. Cette amélioration, combinée à la mobilisation de ressources au titre de l'annulation de la dette multilatérale du FMI, de l'IDA et du FAD, a permis d'améliorer substantiellement le niveau des réserves officielles brutes de la BCM en fin d'année 2006 comme indiqué ci-dessus. Les avoirs du Fonds National des Revenus d'Hydrocarbures (FNRH) ne sont pas pris en compte dans l'estimation de ces réserves.

Le FNRH, dont la gestion est déléguée par le Ministère des Finances à la BCM, a reçu depuis son ouverture en juin 2006 des recettes chiffrées à 180,1 Millions de dollars. Quant aux retraits aux fins de financement du budget de l'Etat, ils se sont élevés à 126,5 millions de dollars, ce qui laisse un solde de 53,6 millions de dollars, soit la contre valeur 14,5 milliards d'Ouguiya, à la date du 5 mars 2007. Ce compte est géré par la BCM conformément aux directives de placement définies par le Comité consultatif de placement qui a été institué.

En matière de finances publiques, notre pays a bénéficié de marges budgétaires qui n'avaient pas été entièrement anticipées au moment de l'adoption de la loi de finances de l'exercice 2006 (bonus exceptionnel de 100 millions de dollars US obtenu dans le cadre du règlement du différend avec la compagnie pétrolière Woodside ; vente en juillet de licences de téléphonie pour un montant de 103 millions de dollars US ; annulation de la dette multilatérale ; conclusion d'un nouvel accord de pêche avec l'Union Européenne sur la période 2006-2011, prévoyant le paiement d'une compensation financière annuelle de 86 millions d'euros, en plus de redevances à payer par les navires). Ces opportunités budgétaires ont amené le Gouvernement de transition à adopter, en juillet 2006, une loi de finances rectificative, autori-

Appendix 7 – Mauritanian government press release 6 February 2006

In this document the Minister of Energy and Petroleum, a member of the Mauritanian military junta of Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, accuses Woodside Petroleum Limited of corruption and of preparing for illegally future gain. Official production had not begun as yet from the Chinguetti oilfield, and the illegal gain was to be from production sharing amendments which were not formally agreed to by the Mauritanian government and thus were to be illegally applied to future production of petroleum from Chinguetti, meant to begin 26 February 2006, some two weeks later..

The shortfall of revenue due to the government is indicated to be some US 100 million, fortuitously almost equal to the loan acquired from Stirling Resources to acquire the full 16% of joint venture participation in the Chinguetti production venture.

Woodside carried out an extensive environmental impact study (to 'high' Australian standard) and indicated that in the very remote event of an oil spill occurring and at a specific time of the year, high pollution of the heavily fished waters offshore from Banc d'Arguin would result. The Mauritanian political elites especially receive rent from (legal and illegal) agreements with foreign fishing fleets, and such an eventuality was seen by the junta personnel as a grave endangerment of their rent-seeking behaviour.

NOTE: Photocopy machines were difficult to come by and copiers that worked effectively were impossible to find. This is the best copy proof I could muster for the quality of document in the first place.

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

La République Islamique de Mauritanie s'est attelée à explorer, identifier et mettre en valeur ses ressources naturelles, notamment minières et pétrolières, pour assurer son développement économique et satisfaire les aspirations légitimes de son Peuple au bien-être social.

A cette fin, l'Etat a mis en place une législation moderne et attractive pour les investisseurs étrangers. Il a aussi élaboré un contrat-type de partage de production pétrolière dont les termes peuvent être négociés par les parties à charge pour le Gouvernement de les soumettre à l'approbation du Parlement.

Une large diffusion a été donnée à ces textes pour que les entreprises intéressées en prennent connaissance. C'est dans ce cadre général que la Société Woodside a passé des Contrats de Partage de Production sur les zones A, B, et C du bassin côtier. Ces contrats ont été dûment signés par les différentes parties avant d'être approuvés conformément à la loi.

La procédure prévue, selon laquelle le contrat doit être préalablement signé par les deux parties, était donc largement connue de Woodside.

Au jour où Woodside se prévaut, de façon inopinée, de quatre avenants aux Contrats de Partage de Production établis en violation de la procédure légale et des usages.

Il s'agit des documents intitulés :

- 1) « Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone B »
- 2) « Avenant d'extension n°2 du CPP, Zone A »
- 3) « Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone C relatif au Bloc 2 »
- 4) « Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone C relatif au Bloc 6 ».

Dès que le Gouvernement en a eu connaissance, il a aussitôt mené des investigations approfondies pour déterminer dans quelles conditions, ces documents ont été signés et approuvés et quelles en sont les incidences. Ces investigations ont établi que les avenants invoqués sont entachés de graves irrégularités et qu'ils causent un préjudice énorme à l'intérêt national.

Pour ce qui est des irrégularités, il y a lieu de souligner, à titre non limitatif, les éléments suivants :

1) la loi autorisant l'approbation des quatre « avenants » date du premier février 2005, alors que Woodside ne les a effectivement signés que le 14 février de la même année, soit deux semaines après la promulgation du texte législatif. Quant au Ministre des mines et de l'industrie, sa signature n'a été apposée, sur deux au moins des avenants, que le 2 mars 2005.

Malgré postérieurement à cette date, un échange de correspondances entre le ministre et Woods de transmettait encore les mêmes avantages, au stade de projet pour signature !

25) Aussi bien devant le Conseil des Ministres que devant le Parlement, les «avantages» ont été présentés comme de simples avantages d'extension de durée de validité. Or, le contenu des avantages est tout autre. Il existe, en effet, un décalage d'un ampleur extrême entre cet objet supposé des «avantages», expressément porté par la loi du 1^{er} février 2005 dans son intitulé, et leur objet réel qui consiste, dans une modification substantielle du contenu des Contrats de Partage de Production, dans l'intérêt exclusif de WOODSIDE.

Pour ce qui est du préjudice, et sans que l'inventaire ne soit exhaustif, les «abus» des «avantages», aujourd'hui, accrus par WOODSIDE, entraînent les conséquences suivantes :

- la baisse de la quote-part de l'Etat dans le protocole pour certaines zones ;
- l'assèchement des contraintes en matière de protection de l'environnement, ce qui implique la mise en péril de nos faune et flore maritimes, et la pérennité de nos ressources halieutiques ;
- la réduction de l'impôt de 15 points dans certaines zones ;
- l'attribution d'un monopole d'exploration et d'exploitation, plusieurs années de plus, sur une grande superficie ;
- la suppression de l'imposition des plus values de cession des éléments d'actif ;
- l'autorisation de la déduction illimitée dans le temps des déficits reportés ;
- le recouvrement immédiat des coûts des forages d'appréciation ;
- les coûts d'abandon dorénavant imputés en partie à l'Etat ;
- la possibilité pour Woods de de passer des marchés de gré à gré pour l'acquisition de biens et services rentrant dans le cadre de l'activité pétrolière du contractant et qui sont des coûts pétroliers recouvrables donc imputables en partie à la Mauritanie, avec tous les risques d'abus qui cela comporte ;
- la réduction de l'obligation de réaliser deux forages d'exploration à un seul dans certaines zones ;
- la modification de la méthode de tenue des comptes du contractant par la centralisation des originaux en Australie, avec seulement une copie non électronique en Mauritanie ;
- le recouvrement sur la CPP zone B des coûts du puits Chinguetti 1, alors déreconnu initialement comme obligation de la zone A ;
- la déduction des charges qui ne sont pas directement affectées à la conduite des opérations pétrolières ;
- la suppression de l'interdiction de vendre la pétrole ou le gaz mauritanien à des pays déclarés hostiles à la Mauritanie ;
- l'assèchement des procédures de la cession à une société affiliée au contractant ;

- la possibilité pour le contractant et ses sous-traitants de faire appel pour leur couverture d'assurances à des compagnies étrangères au détriment des assureurs nationaux ;
- la suppression de la garantie de bonne exécution.

Sans tenir compte de l'incalculable impact des dits «avenants» sur l'environnement et la ressource halieutique, le préjudice financier pour l'Etat mauritanien, se chiffre à des centaines de millions de Dollars US. Cette estimation n'est qu'approximative, le volume définitif du préjudice sera déterminé ultérieurement par voie d'expertise.

L'affaire est donc d'une particulière gravité.

Le Gouvernement Mauritanien a donné officiellement à Woodside avis de sa position. Il l'a invitée à préserver un partenariat transparent et mutuellement bénéfique, fondé sur le respect de la loi et des engagements souscrits de bonne foi.

Il ne peut accepter l'opposabilité d'actes passés en violation délibérée de la procédure et ne comportant que des clauses conçues dans l'intérêt exclusif d'une seule partie.

Toute autre position ouvrirait la porte à l'enracinement des pratiques mafieuses qui saperaient le cadre juridique des activités d'exploration et d'exploitation des hydrocarbures dans notre pays et compromettraient de manière irréversible l'intérêt public.

L'édification de l'Etat de droit commande la soumission de tous à la loi.

Les entreprises étrangères qui entendent contracter avec la Mauritanie se doivent de respecter les procédures légales dont elles n'ignorent pas le contenu en particulier lorsque ce les-ci leur avaient déjà été appliquées à plusieurs reprises.

Tous ceux qui ont prêté la main à une violation de la loi doivent répondre de leurs actes devant les tribunaux. A ce titre, une information judiciaire a été ouverte contre l'ancien Ministre des Mines et de l'Industrie et ses complices pour faux en écriture publique, et autres infractions à la loi pénale.

Sur un autre registre, l'Etat Mauritanien a notifié à Woodside l'existence d'un différend, après qu'elle eut refusé de répondre de façon constructive aux efforts qu'il a déployés - en un mois durant par échanges de correspondances et appels aux réunions - pour ne pas rendre ce contentieux public et lui trouver une solution dans le cadre d'un partenariat solide et transparent.

En tout état de cause, le Gouvernement Mauritanien, comme l'a déclaré solennellement le Président du Conseil Militaire pour la Justice et la Démocratie, Chef de l'Etat, prendra toutes les mesures adéquates pour la protection des intérêts supérieurs de la Mauritanie.

Nouakchott, le 6 février 2006.

LE MINISTRE
MOHAMED ALY OULD SIDI MOHAMED

Appendix 8 – Govt Memorandum explaining the dispute with Woodside

This memorandum was circulated widely within Mauritania only (unlike the note in Appendix 7). The operators and active companies received this document as did the members of the government.

The object of the document is to explain the position of the Mauritanian State in the dispute with Woodside. The argument revolves around three principal points of contention:

1. The clauses of the production sharing contracts previously agreed with the Mauritanian Government
2. The ‘problems’ caused by the amendments to these contracts that have only now been brought to light by the company.
3. The conclusion that the state of Mauritania draws from this situation.

NOTE: Photocopy machines were difficult to come by and copiers that worked effectively were impossible to find. This is the best copy proof I could muster for the quality of document in the first place.

REPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE

Pocheur - Fraternité - Justice

**MEMORANDUM SUR LE DIFFEREND OPPOSANT
LA REPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE DE MAURITANIE
A LA SOCIETE AUSTRALIENNE WOODSIDE**

Janvier 2000

Le présent mémorandum a pour objet d'expliquer la position de l'Etat Mauritanien concernant le différend qui l'oppose à la société Woodside. Il s'articule autour de trois parties.

La première se rapporte au contexte des contrats passés entre le Gouvernement et Woodside.

La seconde est relative aux problèmes posés par les avenants invoqués, aujourd'hui, par cette société.

La troisième porte sur les conclusions que l'Etat mauritanien tire de cette affaire.

I. CONTEXTE GENERAL DES CONTRATS PASSES AVEC WOODSIDE

La République Islamique de Mauritanie s'est attachée à exploiter, de manière optimale, en valeur ses ressources naturelles, notamment minières et pétrolières, pour assurer son développement économique et le bien-être de ses populations.

A cette fin, l'Etat a mis en place une législation moderne qui prend aussi en compte les intérêts des investisseurs étrangers.

L'ordonnance n°88-161 du 15 novembre 1988 relative au régime juridique et fiscal de la recherche et de l'exploitation des hydrocarbures en constitue le texte le plus important.

Pour assurer aux investisseurs une protection efficace et garantir la réalisation optimale des intérêts publics dont l'Etat a la charge, ce texte garantit la validité des contrats passés, dans le domaine de l'exploration et de l'exploitation des hydrocarbures, à leur approbation par la loi.

Dans le souci de promouvoir la transparence et de renforcer la sécurité des opérateurs étrangers, le Gouvernement mauritanien, en 1994, avec l'appui d'une équipe pluridisciplinaire, un contrat type de partage de production dont les clauses peuvent être renégociées par les parties à charge du Gouvernement de les soumettre à l'approbation du Parlement conformément à l'article 35 de l'ordonnance n°88-161. Une large diffusion a été donnée à ces textes afin que toutes les entreprises intéressées en soient informées.

C'est dans ce cadre général que les sociétés HARDMAN PETROLEUM (Mauritanie) Pty Ltd et ELIXIR CORPORATION Pty Ltd ont conclu, le 5 septembre 1995, un Contrat de Partage de Production Pétrolière (CPPI) avec le Gouvernement mauritanien. En vertu de ce contrat approuvé, le 22 janvier 1997 par la loi n°97-010, l'Etat mauritanien a accordé aux sociétés précitées une autorisation exclusive d'exploration portant sur la Zone A (Blocs 3, 4 et 5 situés en offshore) d'une superficie totale de 24 645 km².

Ultérieurement, les sociétés précitées ont, avec l'accord du Gouvernement mauritanien, cédé une partie de leurs intérêts dans ce contrat à l'opérateur WOODSIDE et à d'autres Compagnies pétrolières.

Le 9 juillet 1998, un nouveau Contrat de Partage de Production a été signé entre le Gouvernement et WOODSIDE, AGIP (British Bahrain), HARDMAN/FUSION Oil et ELIXIR. Il porte sur la Zone dite B d'une superficie de 40 960 km², contrats de la Zone A (parties des eaux profondes des blocs 4 et 5). Comme le prévoit

l'ordonnance 88-151, ce contrat a fait l'objet d'une approbation législative (voir loi n°33-033 du 2^e juillet 1999).

Le 7 janvier 1999, deux nouveaux CPP ont été signés entre, d'une part le Gouvernement mauritanien et WOODSIDE MAURITANIA PTY LTD, BRITISH BORNLIO INTERNATIONAL LIMITED, HAROMAN PETROLEUM (MAURITANIA) PTY LTD, ELIXIR CORPORATION PTY LTD et PLANET OIL MAURITANIA LIMITED, d'autre part. Ces contrats ont porté, respectivement sur la Zone C, bloc 2 d'une superficie de 6,662 km² et la Zone C, bloc 6 d'une superficie de 1,875 km².

Ces deux derniers contrats ont, eux aussi, été approuvés par la voie législative (la loi n°56-014 du 23 juin 1999).

La procédure prévue par l'ordonnance n°85-151 selon laquelle le contrat «*établi conformément aux dispositions législatives et réglementaires en vigueur et conjointement signé par le ministre chargé des Mines et le représentant légal du Parairensement*» (3.2) est soumis à l'approbation législative (article 3.3.4) est donc largement connue de WOODSIDE. Cette procédure a du reste été constamment suivie par l'administration pour tous les Contrats de Partage de Production.

De façon inopiné, WOODSIDE se prévaut aujourd'hui de quatre avenants aux Contrats de Partage de Production, établis en totale violation de la procédure légale et du usage régulier suivi en matière d'approbation de ces contrats.

Il s'agit des documents intitulés :

- 1) «Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone B»
- 2) «Avenant d'extension n°2 du CPP, Zone A»
- 3) «Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone C relatif au Bloc 2»
- 4) «Avenant d'extension n°1 du CPP, Zone C relatif au Bloc 3»

Dès que le Gouvernement en a eu connaissance, il a aussitôt mené des investigations approfondies pour déterminer dans quelles conditions ces documents ont été signés et approuvés et quelles en sont les incidences. Ces investigations ont établi que les avenants invoqués sont entachés de graves irrégularités et qu'ils causent un préjudice économique à l'intérêt national.

II. LES PROBLEMES POSES PAR LES AVENANTS INVOQUES PAR LA SOCIETE WOODSIDE

Les "avenants" invoqués ont été établis en violation manifeste des dispositions législatives en vigueur, selon un curieux processus, dans lequel l'approbation législative a précédé la signature!

Le 21 décembre 2004, le ministre des Mines et de l'Industrie de l'époque transmet à WOODSIDE la lettre n°496 dans laquelle il écrit : «... je vous informe que mon département a réussi à obtenir l'accord du Gouvernement pour faire passer les amendements requis sans modification»

Deux jours plus tard, le 23 décembre 2004, le projet est soumis à l'examen du Conseil des ministres. Le contenu d'une communication demandant l'autorisation de signature de quatre avenants d'extension aux Contrats de Partage de Production des Zones A, B et C (lods 2 et 6)

Sans que ces "avenants" n'aient été signés par les parties et sans que le Service du Conseil des ministres ne soit déposé de copies de ces avenants, le même Conseil, dans sa réunion du 29 décembre 2004, est supposé avoir accepté l'exposé des motifs d'un projet de loi présenté par le Premier Ministre en vue de les soumettre à l'approbation du Parlement.

Le 3 janvier 2005, la Commission des Affaires Économiques de l'Assemblée Nationale reçoit Monsieur le ministre des Mines et de l'Industrie qui évoquera devant elle des "avenants" qu'il qualifie de simples avenants d'extension des Contrats de Partage de Production. La Commission recommande à l'Assemblée Nationale l'adoption de la loi autorisant leur approbation.

Le 1^{er} février 2005, la loi disposant que «Le Président de la République est autorisé à approuver quatre avenants d'extension aux Contrats de Partage de Production signés entre la Mauritanie et la société australienne Woodside» est promulguée.

Il y a lieu de souligner les faits suivants :

- 1^{er})- la loi autorisant le principe de l'approbation des quatre avenants dits signés (voir article 1^{er}) date du 1^{er} février 2005 alors que WOODSIDE ne les a effectivement signés que le 14 février de la même année, soit deux semaines après la promulgation du texte législatif. Quant au ministre des Mines et de l'Industrie, sa signature n'a été apposée, sur deux au moins des documents en cause, que le 2 mars 2005. Ces faits constituent une violation manifeste des dispositions prévues de l'ordonnance n°86-51.
- 2^{er})- L'article 1^{er} de la loi précitée du 1^{er} février 2005 se borne à disposer que «Le Président est autorisé à approuver» les avenants signés. Or, le décret d'approbation de ces avenants n'a jamais été pris. Il n'existe à ce jour, aucun acte juridique qui puisse manifester cette approbation du Président de la République, rendue nécessaire par la loi. Comment WOODSIDE peut-elle alors se prévaloir des avenants non approuvés par l'autorité à laquelle la loi a délégué ce pouvoir?

3°)- Aussi bien devant le Conseil des Ministres, que devant le Parlement, les avenants ont été présentés comme de simples avenants d'extension, ce qui explique l'absence de débat sur leur contenu. Or, la réalité est toute autre. Il existe un décalage d'une ampleur extrême entre cet objet supposé des avenants, expressément repris par la loi du 1^{er} février 2005 dans son intitulé et leur objet réel qui consiste, dans une modification substantielle du contenu des Contrats de Partage de Production dans l'intérêt exclusif de WOODSIDE et au préjudice de l'Etat mauritanien. En effet, et sans que l'inventaire ne soit exhaustif, les clauses des avenants aujourd'hui invoqués par WOODSIDE comportent les conséquences suivantes :

- la baisse de 5 points dans la quote-part de l'Etat dans la production pour certaines zones;
- l'allègement des contraintes en matière de respect de l'environnement, ce qui implique la mise en péril de nos faune et flore maritimes, et par voie de conséquence, celle de la pérennité de nos ressources halieutiques;
- la suppression de la garantie de bonne exécution;
- la suppression de l'imposition des plus-values de cession des éléments d'actif;
- autorisation de la déduction illimitée dans le temps des déficits reportés;
- recouvrement immédiat des coûts des forages d'appréciation;
- les coûts d'abandon seraient imputés à l'Etat;
- la possibilité pour WOODSIDE de passer des marchés de gré à gré pour l'acquisition de biens et services rentrant dans le cadre de l'activité pétrolière du contractant, et qui sont des coûts potentiels recouvrables avec tous les risques d'abus que cela comporte;
- un monopole d'exploration plusieurs années de plus sur une grande superficie;
- la réduction d'obligation de réaliser deux forages d'exploration à un seul dans certaines zones;
- la modification de la méthode de tenue des comptes du contractant (centralisation des originaux en Australie avec seulement une copie non électronique en Mauritanie);
- le recouvrement sur le CPP Zone B, des coûts du puits Orinquit 1, considéré initialement comme obligation de la zone A;
- la déduction des charges qui ne sont pas directement affectées à la conduite des opérations pétrolières;
- la suppression de l'interdiction de vendre le pétrole ou le gaz mauritanien à des pays déclarés hostiles à la Mauritanie;
- l'allègement des procédures de la cession à une société affiliée au contractant;
- la possibilité pour le contractant et ses sous-traitants de faire appel pour leur couverture d'assurances à des compagnies étrangères au détriment des assureurs nationaux;
- la réduction de l'impôt de 10 points dans certaines Zones.

III. CONCLUSION

Les événements invoqués par WOODSIDE pose des problèmes d'une gravité extrême, en raison tant de l'ampleur des irrégularités qui entachent ces documents que de celle du préjudice qui en résulte pour le pays au triple plan économique, environnemental et politique.

Le Gouvernement mauritanien a donc officiellement à WOODSIDE avis de sa position et l'a invitée à préserver un partenariat transparent et mutuellement bénéfique, fondé sur le respect de la loi et des engagements souscrits de bonne foi.

Il ne peut accepter l'opposabilité d'actes passés en violation délibérée de la procédure légale, et ne souscrivant, de surcroît, que des clauses conçues dans l'intérêt exclusif d'une seule partie.

Toute autre position ouvrirait la porte à l'arbitraire et à la pratique, malhonnête, qui saperait le cadre juridique des activités d'exploration et d'exploitation des hydrocarbures dans notre pays et compromettrait, de manière irréversible, l'intérêt public.

L'édification de l'Etat de droit commande la soumission de tous à la loi. Les entreprises étrangères qui entendent contracter avec la Mauritanie se doivent de respecter les procédures légales dont elles n'ignorent pas le contenu, en particulier lorsque celles-ci leur avaient déjà été appliquées à plusieurs reprises.

Les agents publics qui prêtent la main à une violation de la loi doivent répondre de leurs actes devant les tribunaux compétents.

Devant le refus de WOODSIDE de rechercher avec lui, comme il y a été engagé dans ses différents communiqués et lors des réunions tenues avec ses représentants, un règlement amiable conforme aux dispositions législatives et réglementaires normalement applicables et compatible avec l'impératif d'équilibre qui doit présider à toute relation contractuelle durable, le Gouvernement mauritanien entend assurer, par les moyens appropriés, la défense des intérêts nationaux.

Il s'agit, en tout état de cause, à continuer sa ferme volonté de respecter tous ses engagements internationaux et à régler ses différends conformément au droit.

Appendix 9 – Participants’ views on relationship of petroleum and upheavals

Participants’ comments on the relevance of petroleum and its connection to social and political disruptive events between 2001 and 2011 in Mauritania

Note: The quotes below make up 98 kilobytes of data and represent less than 0.01% of the 1.2 million kilobytes of data collected in the course of participant interviews.

1. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q07A 110406 Peulh Bank employee
Ly Questionnaire> - § 2 references coded [1.03% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.41% Coverage

Participant I believe that if it is well managed, the money from oil can be placed where it should be placed. That is to say in the health, education and development sectors.

Reference 2 - 0.61% Coverage

Participant We have fishing. Well, unfortunately fishing has not been well managed. Ok, it has been well exploited but the country has not really taken advantage of the benefits because of the poor management of this sector. Right, now we must prevent this from happening in the oil sector.

2. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q11A 110407 Maur Ex-Senator
Questionnaire 11A> - § 2 references coded [1.86% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.35% Coverage

Researcher Do you think that the "Taya" coup d'état with the removal of Taya and the set-up of the junta, with Mohammed Vall... had been hastened by oil? It happened before the discovery of oil.

Participant In my opinion, no! In my opinion, it does not come from oil.

Researcher Where does it come from?

Participant No, because Taya's regime had become unpopular, very unpopular! People did not... hum... there were elections, which were fraudulent each time, according to the majority of people ..., but the common people could not accept that any longer. Well, all that, it is in ... but the coup d'état ... er ... there was an attempt of a coup d'état at first in 2003, by the military. The civilians did not intervene in there. However, the military, themselves did not agree on the way to run things and they thought there were many injustices. Taya, he works for his family, because his family... the wealthiest people in Mauritania, are from his family...

Reference 2 - 0.51% Coverage

Participant ... there are both sides to the issue ... That is to say the tribe tries to put its people around the President but the President ... the one who has the power, he uses the people from his tribe to strengthen his power. This is because they are the first people he trusts, the people from his family and his tribe... In my opinion.
No... in my opinion, oil has not played a part in it.

3. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q19A Maur Hotel PDG Niang Questionnaire 19B> - § 1 reference coded [0.53% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.53% Coverage

Participant So to answer your question, even if the money from oil has not affected all sides, it was a determining factor. In what we call the financial issues, they were huge in a very short timeframe in 2005 and 2010.

4. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q20A 110415 Maur Hotel Pool Attendant Questionnaire 20A> - § 3 references coded [1.34% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.31% Coverage

Researcher Did you find the system of the foreigners, who came for the oil, was good for example?

Participant Yes, it was good to see them because economically it made the hotel profitable [telephone rings], which is our source of income.

Reference 2 - 0.72% Coverage

Participant As far as the general Mauritanian society is concerned... Really. We have not seen the money from oil. However, within the hotel, we saw people come in and who represented good revenue for the hotel, and which is our source of income for us who work in the hotel. So that, we saw that. In return, too, the 2,000 employees who worked with Woodside were a good thing as well because I know some people who worked there; they were well paid and very pleased with their wages. Nevertheless, the population has not really seen the money from oil.

Reference 3 - 0.31% Coverage

Researcher Do you believe that the 2005 coup was caused by oil?

Participant ... No.

Researcher What caused the 2005 coup d'état?

Participant Dissatisfied people.

Researcher What with?

Participant ... With political management of Mauritania.

5. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q21A 110415 Miscellaneous Questionnaire 20A> - § 3 references coded [3.92% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.60% Coverage

Participant ... Four years ago or at the beginning of the oil era in Mauritania, hope rose from all corners of Mauritania. The work was there and

people were very happy about all that... However, Woodside started [and] a few years later, they left. However, I do not know what frightened them and made them go. I do not know. Maybe it is at the "highest levels" [the political elites]?

Reference 2 - 1.24% Coverage

Researcher But oil had not yet arrived? It has to come really to make an effect?
Because oil was going to come, they said "Let's do it!" and overthrew the others?

Participant Because if oil is there, they will be the richest in Mauritania, they will do lots of things. Look at former President (Taya), he did nothing for the country, he did not even built infrastructures. He (Taya) did nothing for the country. He has done nothing for the country. Really, he has only made his entourage rich and the population suffered from hunger, and all that...

Researcher So oil comes... Did he (Taya) have to be removed?

Participant Yes, I think so, for me, I think it's [that]...

Researcher So there is a link with oil.

Participant Well, on one hand we can say that. On one hand, we can say that because of [or before] oil, we have to stop him (Taya). Nevertheless, he had already done a lot of damage and he was definitely very unpopular!!!

Reference 3 - 2.08% Coverage

Participant There are people who did not even know that Mauritania has iron ore. We also have fish, we have...

Researcher And yet, as we said, SNIM has not...

Participant As I said, Sir, this SNIM building [the hotel building is owned by SNIM] is like a drop in the ocean. This is an asset... A property asset. For example, SNIM... .. should have done a lot more... they could have major building sites in the country with warehouses, schools, health centres, they would have distributed "things", medicine in the schools, in the health centres. That, that is what people needed... Educate the children, build higher education institutions a bit everywhere in Mauritania, build health centres and equip them in the most remote places of Mauritania, set up agricultural permits to fight poverty. ... Irrigated Agricultural permits for the fight against poverty, [for] food security in towns inside the country.

It is there that the need is very important.

Nevertheless, SNIM is there! SNIM, which is a big company, that turns over billions of ouguiyas per year in the infrastructure field and which has, [for example] the hotels.

However, for all that, it fails to help the population, the poor who are in the country... They really are the sons of the country. We should

expect great social initiatives from SNIM or returns [from the petroleum production] in this country.
 However, people do not see any of this! We see nothing of iron ore or petroleum [revenues]!
 We do not see it. We do not see any of it!

6. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q23A 110416 Maur Hotel Reception Athié Questionnaire 23A> - § 1 reference coded [0.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.59% Coverage

Participant Maybe it is a coincidence [that Taya was overthrown as the petroleum began to be produced].
Researcher A coincidence?
Participant But maybe people had not wanted him anymore for a very long time. It is just that they did not have the opportunity to remove him officially.
Researcher A coincidence that is very, very difficult to deny?
Participant But even so it is a coincidence, I do think it is a coincidence...

7. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q26A 110419 Maur Hotel Accountant Dia Questionnaire 26A> - § 1 reference coded [1.91% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.91% Coverage

Participant Us Mauritanians, we do not like petroleum. Where there is petroleum, there are problems.
Researcher Exactly, that is indeed what I am studying!
Participant Where there is petroleum, there are problems. For us, thank God, for the moment, we do not have this problem because in all of the oil operations, there are all the people working there; there are the Moors, there are the Harpulaar, there is everybody... There is no racial distinction. [His body language gives the appearance that he is not telling the truth?] ...
Researcher Wait, wait. I did not understand at all what you said.
Participant I said that with oil... which people are interested in this resource? People that work in that industry to earn a living! The people who work in oil, they are Mauritanians. There are all sorts. There are the Harpulaar, there are... Moreover, everybody works. The Moors, the Harpulaar... Therefore, everyone gains something for his or her own life. That is why for us, we want God to help us overcome that problem of oil...
Researcher You do not want the oil?
Participant Oil always brings problems because it comes from the Westerners. The Americans will do everything so people will fight each other;

they come to support someone, to win petroleum. The French, it is the same. What they do in Libya, Libya now, why haven't they started that with the Ivory Coast? Because there is oil! Qatar, they don't have any oil anymore, they want to come to Libya to take over the oil. Us, we're aware of that.

8. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q29A 110420 MAUR Entrepreneur Ba Questionnaire 29A> - § 1 reference coded [1.04% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.04% Coverage

Participant Well, that I don't know. Myself, I'm not... I don't make such analysis. I know that whenever there's been a coup d'état, there's been oil, but I heard that there's oil here in Mauritania, but I haven't seen anything of it yet. I have seen no benefits from it...

9. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q37A 111214 Maur Senegal Historian N'Gaïde General Disc Q37A> - § 1 reference coded [0.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.59% Coverage

Participant Anyway, me, when they said that oil was discovered, I was scared. Because I thought about all those African countries, where there's been a real mess. Nigeria... The example that comes to my mind is Nigeria where there's all that crime! We're in an extremely fragile zone, here in Mauritania... What with the arrival of Al-Qaeda in this area, the lack of democracy in the Mauritanian situation...

10. <Internals\\Interviews - Afro-Mauritanians\\Q38A 111220 Maur Street Discussion on International Relations 38A>

Reference 1 - 6.65% Coverage

Participant: So, it's not possible that us, simple citizens, we shouldn't eat that little bit. Therefore, it stays, and you, you're on the right track. You know what's happening. You know the quantity that has gone. You know the quantity. You can estimate.

Researcher: But you too can verify the quantity. You have access to the internet!

Participant: I can verify the quantity.

Researcher: Absolutely!

Participant: I can verify the quantity but if I want to verify the quantity, and it's a lot, I become angry because I haven't "tasted" any. If it's little... there's no need to talk about oil or that oil is still under the sea. It's still in the same spot. It hasn't come out yet.

Researcher: What needs to be done is that the country needs to understand how companies want to be treated. It's not... They don't want to steal. Nowadays, companies don't want to steal. There's too much control. Nevertheless, Mauritians continue to say, "They're going to steal from us! They're going to steal from us!" No. The company needs to be managed in a certain way. The company has to come into a country like Mauritania, knowing how to deal with people because there's a great lack of...

Participant: trust?

Researcher: Of trust, but which comes from a lack of cultural knowledge. They don't understand your culture but neither do you understand the foreigners' culture. It's the same. You both have this problem.

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: Both of you!

11. <Internals\\Interviews - Black Maures\\Q22A 110416 Maur Hotel Reception Isselmou Questionnaire 22A> - § 1 reference coded [2.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.58% Coverage

Researcher The country could become sick with the 'oil curse' then? Which means social problems, coups d'état, clans... clan battles, ethnic battles...

Participant Me, I don't know... because it's a bit complicated... Still I would say that if he [President Abdel Aziz] continues in the same vein, he would do a lot for the country... Nevertheless, there is a negative side that he refuses to acknowledge [the hardship of the population]...

Researcher Which is?

Participant It is that 'social justice'. We need this justice!

Researcher This social justice must come...?

Participant We need social justice for all Mauritians. Put a just system in place for everybody and not just for a particular ethnic group. [He should attempt to] reunite all Mauritians... something that the state... I can say it, refuses to do!!

Researcher It refuses to do it?

Participant ... I emphasise that the state refuses to fully commit itself to settle an issue which is capital ... the issue of society is a [grave] danger. That's what I say. I give the example of Tunisia; who would have believed... No one would have ever believed that it would happen in Tunisia one day.

Researcher Tunisia was very stable, yes!

Participant There's a Wolof proverb, which says, "If you carry on putting water into a pot, if water reaches the opening, the water will spill out. So before water reaches the lip of the pot, one has to find a solution to calm it, to settle it" ... This means [in the case of the Mauritanian

society] that a social solution needs to be found. We're not a complicated population. Mauritania doesn't have a complicated population... All you have to do is sort out that social justice... to establish social justice and to give people food and water. That's all. I think that Mauritania is not a complicated country to manage... However, people mustn't take side with a particular community [ethnicity] you do this and favour one ethnicity over another ... It is serious...

12. <Internals\\Interviews - Black Maures\\Q35A 111211 Maur Political Science Lecturer Zakaria gen disc Q35A> - § 1 reference coded [0.31% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.31% Coverage

Participant Yes, but we haven't taken our oil out yet. We don't plan much, do we? (laughter)
Researcher Let's hope that it doesn't come yet, at least for a while, for the...
Participant I agree with you.

13. <Internals\\Interviews - Mixed-blood Mauritians\\Q05A 110404 Maur Tourist Shop partner Questionnaire 05A WMA> - § 1 reference coded [0.28% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.28% Coverage

Participant Mauritians expected this [oil] money. However, this money didn't reach the poor. Rich people become richer and richer instead... ..

14. <Internals\\Interviews - Mixed-blood Mauritians\\Q06A 110405 Maur Receptionist Fatimetou Questionnaire> - § 1 reference coded [3.98% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.98% Coverage

Participant Frankly, I can't say much about oil, but I can say that at the time of [the discovery of the] oil deposits [offshore in 2001 to 2005], it did a lot of good for the country. [There was a lot of work] and the people really benefited from it. This did us...
Researcher Money that came in? [There was a lot of economic] activities?
Participant Money came in!
Researcher Lots of employment?
Participant There was a lot of employment, but it also caused some harm because lots of people... it's at that time that housing prices skyrocketed.
Researcher Ah, inflation arrived?
Participant ... That's it! Therefore, because it was oil industry foreigners, they were ready to rent houses at any price. That meant, at the time, house owners were increasing rental prices on all houses. Therefore, we can say that on one side that was good for the country, while on the other hand, for the ordinary people, that wasn't so good at all...
Researcher For the ordinary people, the situation was not the best?

Participant ... That's it. It was very uncomfortable for the ordinary people because they could not meet those sorts of rents [as prices rose]. Live was in all becoming very expensive...

Researcher ... Do you think that the way of life, the standard of living that this oil activity brought about, in fact raised everybody's living standards?

Participant ... [It did, but] only for some.

Researcher For some. For whom?

Participant For some. For some, that brought change.

Researcher For whom?

Participant For people who owned houses or companies or something, how to say that?

Researcher The wealthy have even richer lives, [although they already live well]?

Participant ... That's it!

Researcher The poor became poorer.

Participant They became poorer in general. The exception was for those that were recruited [in the petroleum industry] . For the rest, you can't say that...

Researcher There wasn't any improvement?

Participant [you can't say] that there were no improvements.

15. <Internals\\Interviews - Mixed-blood Mauritians\\Q09B 110407 Maur Hotel Gen Manager Questionnaire 09B> - § 1 reference coded [0.54% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.54% Coverage

Participant Already with that [the 1989 ethnic problems and the reign of the colonels], that's was the end [of the country]. If there now wasn't the beginning of activities related to geological exploration for oil and minerals... There would be no one [coming to Mauritania]... ..

16. <Internals\\Interviews - Mixed-blood Mauritians\\Q27A 110419 Maur Journalist Barrada Questionnaire 27A> - § 2 references coded [6.90% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.71% Coverage

Participant That will happen, I know, because where there is wealth at a geopolitical level, it can then create - how can you say that again - it can cause a malevolent effects ... That is to say the reverse of what we want.

Researcher Isn't that what has already happened...?

Participant What? Ah yes...

Researcher Isn't that what has already happened...?

Participant No, no, here we have nothing.

Reference 2 - 6.19% Coverage

Researcher The flow of petroleum begins.... Oil production is forecast in February 2006; on February 26th, 2006 and there's the coup d'état in August 2005.

Participant ... Yes... that...

Researcher Skulduggeries by Woodside are reported by the government on 6th February 2006.

Participant Yes, yes, yes, you're right, there is...

Researcher There's a link, there's a link, isn't there?

Participant No, no, that was an interpretation that there was the coup d'état and all that... Nevertheless, was there...?

Researcher Wait, wait... That [event] was a coup or wasn't it a coup?

Participant That was a coup d'état.

Researcher But it happened six months before oil [began to flow]?

Participant Yes

Researcher [so you say that] there's no link?

Participant As a researcher and a journalist there's a link. That was predicted, it was said that there would be issues with oil [revenues], [but] what is often [also] said, is that if there are other reasons, there are other issues, behind all that...

Researcher So this tsunami [of revenues], the great wave of financial resources arrives in Mauritania...

Participant No, but that [link] cannot be confirmed at 100%.

Researcher No, no, no! Not everything can be confirmed, [I understand]... That's a dream?

Participant No, no, I say that it was a coup d'état; is there a link between the coup d'état and the discovery of oil?

Researcher Yes [that is what I am asking]?

Participant That cannot be said at 100% because there was an accumulation of issues.

Researcher And as a journalist, do you think there's a link?

Participant We can say there's a link. We can say that. I don't confirm it. As a journalist, I cannot confirm that...

Researcher Is a journalist always sure of what he says...?

Participant No, no, no, no, come on...

Researcher Even when there are stupidities...? (laughs)

Participant No, no, no, no, but on the other hand, as a journalist... I am also an analyst.

Researcher Oh, really?

Participant If you have a hypothesis. If you can't talk about uncertainties on a socio-political phenomenon, since I know that, it has to be examined within an historical framework. There was an accumulation [of issues], there was frustration [in the population], there were several major problems and, a power, you realise that had lasted more than 20 years and was beginning to really [be beyond the "use by date"]... people have changed; that's what is happening in Libya, there's already oil [at the centre of the issues]...

Researcher ... But, you're telling me that the cost of change was a door that opened and a door that shut. It's the same people around Abdel Aziz. So what are you telling me?

Participant Ah yes, they are the same, the same, the same people but, but why? There were [many] other coups and other attempts before the discovery of oil.

Researcher The Oualad Nasr before?

Participant Ah yes, so that adds to the issues.... Since the system in place is what we call "change from the street". "Change from the street" because people are really trying to regulate their living conditions so that in fact it doesn't affect them [there are no negative issues to deal with]. Look at what's currently happening in Egypt. Everyone is predicting that the president is going to be imprisoned because there's a change from the bottom. So we're going to arrange everything and so the previous system, we're going to set him up, and even the former minister and all {incomprehensible!} ... What happened with Ely Mohamed Vall since he was in the same system; he tried to talk and avoid the settling of [old] scores according to his vision. Maybe he didn't want to share things at 100% with others as they had carried out a "Palace coup".

17. <Internals\Interviews - Mixed-blood Mauritians\Q31A 110421 Maur Hotel Restaurant Head Aly Questionnaire 28A (3)> - § 5 references coded [11.39% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.69% Coverage

Participant I am like a lot of Mauritians who can't smell the scent of petroleum! (Laughs)... Like many Mauritians, we only hear about "petroleum, petroleum, petroleum"... However, we have gained nothing... As for me, personally I have seen nothing [of petrol or of its revenues]! For me, a small clique [of elites] shares any revenues that come from this petroleum... ..

Reference 2 - 0.55% Coverage

Participant ... I remember when I was at college, for example. I had a teacher who used to tell me "If SNIM was well managed - if the mining operations were well managed - all Mauritians would have a salary... There wouldn't be any poor people here! "

Reference 3 - 5.23% Coverage

Researcher [Civil] society didn't gain anything from the exploitation of the country's natural resources...?

Participant ... The fish? We were always told that Mauritania's waters were the richest waters in fish in the world. So there should normally be revenues [from these resources], and benefits should be huge... These benefits, what should they normally be used for in a country? They're for infrastructures, for education, health and all that. That's it when we say that. For example, we say that the Ivory Coast has cocoa, sells cocoa. Normally the benefits must be used for other things. There's the example of Senegal; Senegal is rich, but knowing that the state compared to us - they have nothing. The subsoil in Mauritania is very rich, according to what we hear, what we see on...

Researcher " Rich" you say? in minerals [ore deposits] you mean?

Participant Rich, as in ore deposits!! Normally when it's well managed, when the benefits are well managed, we should exceed regardless! The [Mauritanian] market economy should be greater than Senegal's, or greater than the other bordering countries' economies, really! However, [here in Mauritania] in my view, [we suffer from] poor management, embezzlement of funds, corruption and [much more of] all that ...

Researcher Nepotism?

Participant Nepotism, what does that mean?

Researcher Nepotism means: "I give the job to my brother or to my..."

Participant That's it, that's it, all this is in the image of...

Researcher But who does that?

Participant Who does that? It's the state, which must prevent that... However, it's the state, which is doing it... The state is at fault... In addition, I say that the foreign companies themselves are guilty... ... For example, the World Bank and the IMF, finance [a project]. Normally when you finance something, you come later to check [progress]; you ask, "Is what I financed well managed?" ... "I" [the foreign institutions and lenders] come to check, see that nothing has been done... However, they keep funding their project! I believe that there is complicity with the lending partners. For me, I could not accept to finance billions and billions [of dollars], to change something, to improve something... [Come back] two or three years [after], and see [that nothing has been done!], and still carry on giving more... There's complicity or what?... There's complicity! If it were I, I would punish both the state, and the lending partners!

Reference 4 - 2.17% Coverage

Researcher Do you think that the government manages the country's natural resources revenues well? Whether it may be iron ore, gold or oil?

Participant That's what I told you from the beginning. I said that if it was well managed, normally, Mauritania revenues should far exceed the level [at which it is currently!] ... For me, the country is poorly managed. It is very poorly managed. I believe there is a small minority of elites who line their pockets. Who do not care for the general population... Who only care about [lining their] pockets with money and enriching themselves... Because for me, a country which takes care of its resources; Education should be [paramount]... now!!! As far as education is concerned, [Mauritania], lacks schools, lacks colleges... Infrastructures should be much more developed, it should far exceed [what it is today]! Aziz has had some roads tarred in Nouakchott recently... Nevertheless, Mauritania, it's huge, it's not only Nouakchott! Yes, admittedly Nouakchott, is the capital city, [but that is not all]??

Reference 5 - 2.74% Coverage

Researcher Petroleum arrived at the beginning of 2006. There was the coup d'état in 2005, few months before. You think they [these events] are linked?

Participant Me, I would not say that they are linked... Because in reality, even before oil, you could have felt the tension [societal pressure] beginning to rise...

Researcher But, oil took some time to come really... 2001 for the first discovery; were there tensions before that?

Participant ... We knew that Maaouya's government was instable...

Researcher Even before that?

Participant There are some that say that it's since his wife died, you know? Taya was not an open man towards people... Since his wife - the other one - died, he marries one of his relatives, and he came under a lot of pressure ... There you are, that is what the Maures are like!

Researcher [Taya was under a lot of pressure] from the family?

Participant That's it, since then, it's started... Then, there were the problems as well within the Maure tribes... It is true that they are united when it comes to fight the Negro-Africans, but amongst themselves... Between tribes, there are many problems... It has to be said nevertheless, that [Maaouya] made all the Maure tribes very rich ...

18. <Internals\\Interviews - Nationalists\\Q02A 110404 Maur Hotel Reservation off Questionnaire> - § 5 references coded [5.47% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.39% Coverage

Researcher Iron had been a resource for the country since the seventies, at least. Do you think that it has helped the life of people here? Your own life, personally, for example?

Participant I would say yes, on one hand, because we're really an iron-producing country so it's thanks to iron that we have in this country and which today has enabled the whole population, including myself, to live really, I think... reasonably well. Because really it's a great potential that we have, and that we're trying to exploit...

Reference 2 - 1.29% Coverage

Participant Yes, I would say yes. Yes, I would say yes, there are people who are comfortably off, whether Negro-Africans or Maures, and I think that all are intimately linked to the resources revenues of the country...

Researcher But the general population, does it gain from this [exploitation of resources]?

Participant Yes, he does [eventually] gains from [the exploitation of natural resources] because in fact, because X or Y [who has some of this revenue] comes to my shop to make a purchase for example, and I gains from it. Just as X or Y, that's it...

Researcher There's a cascade. It's a "cascade effect"?

Participant That's it! It's a cascade effect really...

Reference 3 - 0.44% Coverage

Participant Some people are favoured. They are the elites that reap profits from revenues ahead of the disfavoured masses. That's it!

Researcher Whether that may be Negro-Africans or Maure?

Participant That's right. The race or the skin colour does not matter, there are always [elites] that... [take advantage of the situation ahead of the common man]... ...

Reference 4 - 1.47% Coverage

Researcher [Do you think that] oil going to change things for Mauritania [and its people] if it come in a big, big, big way?

Participant Normally, it should change things... normally.

Researcher How?

Participant If it comes in big, it must induce change, but [as it comes, the elites] would have time to change to... to "line their pockets", that's the problem. While, in reality, that period should be an opportunity to generate opportunities, give work to the people, to create and grow...
...

Researcher [Create] employment?

Participant Really to achieve things! If that's...

Researcher [Raise] the standard of living?

Participant [The standard of living] and much more normally... However, this remains to be seen... Will it be the case or not?

Reference 5 - 0.88% Coverage

Researcher If [the government] manages [this resource] poorly, what will they do wrong? What will go wrong?

Participant ... There'll be a higher rate of employment, maybe. Instead of prices being lowered, maybe there will be [inflation] ... That's not what we need. What we need is that everyone...

Researcher [has] employment?

Participant ...[That everyone] has his job, that staples' prices are cut, and all, that's it...

19. <Internals\\Interviews - Nationalists\\Q12A 110408 Maur Hotel employee 1 Questionnaire 12A WMA> - § 4 references coded [4.89% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.43% Coverage

Participant Oil, frankly, frankly, frankly... Me, I don't even believe that oil exists [in Mauritania]. Because, for few years when we had started to talk about oil, we thought that it would make our life a little easier at least. However, it made it more difficult.

Reference 2 - 0.18% Coverage

Participant In fact, here, frankly, regarding the political side. It is a country that is not very stable, and that, well before oil.

Reference 3 - 1.91% Coverage

Researcher [what do you think would happen if all of a sudden] revenues [from the exploitation of] resources arrive, if suddenly, we find great oil resources...?

Participant Yes...?

Researcher Do you think that this money will find its way straight into the elites' pockets? On the other hand, will the President [Abdel Aziz] be more careful?

Participant Well, frankly, it's difficult to predict. Because when we see... when we see what happens everywhere in Africa, oil has only increased the problems. It has only increased [society's] problems. It has only increased the problems. If you see... Countries that have fewer natural resources, have fewer problems.

Researcher We call that the "Oil Curse"... Do you think that's real?

Participant Yes. For example, if we take our neighbour, Senegal, it's very true that life [there] is very difficult. They don't have natural resources [as we do]. There is a greater population than in [Mauritania]... However, if you look closely at the country, they have fewer problems than other countries, which are [wealthier]..., which have oil and all that. You have never heard of coup d'états there [as in Mauritania]. The coup d'états, we only hear about them in countries in Africa where there's oil (laughs) in general...!

Reference 4 - 2.36% Coverage

Researcher Do you think that the August 2005 coup d'état was linked to oil that came in 2006? Indeed, was the failed coup d'état attempt which occurred in 2003 also linked to the 2006 beginning of petroleum production?

Participant I would say, yes.

Researcher Why?

Participant ... Why? It was because everyone wanted to get something out of the revenues for themselves.

Researcher When you have the power... When you are in government, you have the potential to put your hand in the till?

Participant Yes, yes... That's right...!

Researcher OK. Do you think that this is correct, because I just put these words in your mouth?

Participant No, it's true. It's true. It's true. It's true!

Researcher Don't you think that petroleum industry could bring lots of opportunities for the Mauritians? Bring revenues for the country?

Participant Of course. Of course. There would be many opportunities...

Researcher For the society [the people]?

Participant For Mauritanian society. However, the problem remains... Will these revenues be better managed? That's why I'm very careful with what I say. I have, for the moment, great hope in this president [Aziz].

Nevertheless, for this country [Mauritania] coup d'états are an integral part of our culture... of our political scene. In that area, Mauritania is not stable at all! That's why... We never know what's going to happen tomorrow.

20. <Internals\\Interviews - Nationalists\\Q13A 110410 Maur Activist politician Questionnaire> - § 1 reference coded [1.03% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.03% Coverage

Participant ... Never! It's never been the case [that the exploitation of natural resources in this country was well managed]. Never! Never in 50 years of independence, have natural resources ever been well managed! Never! That's the great problem with this country!

Researcher [Is it due to a] lack of transparency? ... [to] embezzlement?

Participant No, it's not even due to a lack of transparency... It's the systematic plundering by the elites of state revenues.

Researcher It is Plundering? Is it embezzlement, corruption?

Participant Plundering! That is exactly what I mean. I am saying that the [political] elites who watch over [our country and its natural resources] ... are full of greed. They take everything for themselves and leave nothing for the [the general, impoverished population].

21. <Internals\\Interviews - Nationalists\\Q17A 110413 Maur Hotel Audit controller Questionnaire 017A> - § 2 references coded [3.14% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.02% Coverage

Participant I'm very, very, very optimistic. Why? Because, according to official statements, in a year or two, the government will be working on the situation in place for the whole population. That's why, I believe that in few years' time and according to a [inaudible], what I learnt very recently [inaudible] that [there are [major petroleum discoveries in the north]... I met some people... I have a friend who works with the oil people in the North...

Researcher with Total ?

Participant Yes, with Total... Last year, they confirmed that in 2012 or 2013, Mauritania would be like the Gulf countries, because...

Reference 2 - 2.11% Coverage

Researcher Do you think that the coup attempt in 2003 and the successful 2005 coup, had a link with the oil discovery?

Participant No, no, no! It has nothing to do with oil.!!!

Researcher You don't think so?

Participant No!

Researcher Don't you think that it was a question of grabbing power because oil [and oil revenues] was soon arriving?

Participant No, no, no.! That is not it. It had nothing to do with it!

Researcher Why? How can you say that [with such certainty]? How can you say it with such conviction!

Participant It is because [with] the 2005 coup, Mauritanian society was in a sad place from an economical point of view and especially for the [civil] society. [Social instability] That was one of the two [main reasons]. [Secondly] there was a tribe, you could nearly say, which monopolized the State.

Researcher Are you talking about the Smacides?

Participant Yes, I am sorry, the Smacides. Today, there is another problem. Yet more tribes are trying to monopolize the State [and its resources and sources of revenues]!

Researcher Was it another tribe?

Participant Yes, it was another tribe, The Oualad Bousba. So that's why there was [a coup]... It is not oil [the reason for the 2005 coup]. If we now look at the State. There are people who have monopolised State [and its resources] in favour of the Oualad Bousba. They have taken all the opportunities.... They [have] "lots of luck" [in that position], while the others, the Smacides; they have lost everything!

Researcher You mean that the family or the tribe at the top "turns the economic [resources and revenues]" towards themselves?

Participant Yes!

22. <Internals\Interviews - Nationalists\Q41A 111223 ex-President Ely M Vall on US 100 million> - § 1 reference coded [3.56% Coverage]
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Reference 1 - 3.56% Coverage

Participant I think that all companies in the world, be they oil companies [or others] steal, cheat and often do so in an [open] way... What I am interested in, is that I do not let myself be ripped off, that's all.

Researcher ... does any agreement needs to be fair and equitable?

Participant That's it! Fair! I told to Woodside; "... I will not treat you any other way but legally. Nevertheless, you are all guilty as accessories to this [unjust] situation. I will [now] request of you to restore the [legal and agreed] rights of my country! Once you have done that, I will treat you as if nothing had happened with the territory of Mauritania.... It will not be my problem [I will not hound you]... [It is just that] your accounts"... Never mind, all oil companies "cheat", all companies "steal", if they can get away with it. It's up to us to protect our national rights!

Researcher [Rather than cheating, don't you think that] It may be a matter of business negotiations?

Participant Yes, that's what I mean! That is it, exactly! These are business negotiations. If someone is duped in a negotiation, or if someone yields, or even if an authority - official or not official – is conned, it's

his or her problem! I personally have no resentment towards the company, Woodside. I have absolutely no problem at all [with Woodside].

I told Woodside; "You have despoiled [you have violated] Mauritania, you and your partners. I am not aware if it is you alone, because you're the leader of the group, or if it is all the partners [but you must restore the agreed contract clauses and pay a penalty]..."

23. <Internals\Interviews - Westerns\Q39A 111221 Maur Anon French Nouakchott Hotel owner on effect of oil> - § 9 references coded [10.90% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.27% Coverage

Participant Basically, what has come about is that everyone has had his or her eyes full of... [duped]... there were dollar signs in their eyes, and everyone speculated. Everyone was persuaded that they would become rich and everything collapsed just as quickly. So, people who owned houses, etc., evicted the people who were lived there and began to rent at a price six times higher [bringing about inflation], and thinking to themselves: "The oil people will come an live in it [and we will become rich]!! ". Basically, there was the common impression "that something is going to happen". Everybody that invested themselves in this "something ", when [in the end] there was nothing!

Reference 2 - 0.57% Coverage

Participant Well me, when, at a certain moment, I was told, finally, there may be things which will come out, etc. I wasn't persuaded that it was a good thing. First, because we have not seen lots of countries, which have oil [and at the same time] have a political stability.

Reference 3 - 0.66% Coverage

Participant They [the elites] were persuaded that we were going to end up like an "African Dubai".

Researcher Were you going to be rich?

Participant ... Yes, and it would be like Dubai... Of course, you understand, that there is a lot to be done in order to create a place so structured as to resemble Dubai, "there is a big margin" and we have a major problem of "organisational skill" here in Mauritania [but, still they dreamt]!!

Reference 4 - 1.43% Coverage

Participant At one period, huge advertisement billboards went up. The enthusiasm [Woodside's 2001 petroleum discovery generated] was fascinating! What did these billboards say? ... The billboard showed a huge photo that was the Dubai skyscrapers with the Nouakchott Saudi mosque photoshopped in the middle... It was meant to show Nouakchott... I wonder if it was not political.

Researcher Was that supposed to represent Nouakchott?

Participant Yes, it was represent Nouakchott in 2020...

Researcher That was not a political [poster]. It was one of the business elites... I think that it was Ould Nouegued. That billboard panel was on the road leaving the airport, at the roundabout.

Participant Yes, that is correct!

Researcher A big billboard said "Nouakchott 2020".

Participant That's it!

Reference 5 - 1.01% Coverage

Researcher Don't you think that the Mauritanian [government] has the mentality [to be able to manage a tsunami of benefits from the natural resources in the country]?

Participant Well look, hasn't the government indeed negotiated, or will negotiate, exclusively for his [Aziz] benefit and for the benefit of his tribe?

Researcher Why? Has this happened? Will it happen?

Participant But of course! Hasn't it happened already? The arrival of Woodside and the perturbed [period in Mauritania] was "financed"... There's was [plenty of] "money passed under the table"? Where did it go? Have "the people" seen it?

Reference 6 - 3.39% Coverage

Participant What I see and make of this... [This corruption is] in the real estate, and the industry faltered. [It is present in the] hospitality industry, that industry has faltered. Which means it's the same [everywhere in Mauritania]. Many people had constructed houses [and hotels], thinking that they could also participate in "eating the cake"...

Researcher Ah, so it's not the oil's fault, then?

Participant It is not the fault of oil! It is not the fault of oil at all!

Researcher Is it not the fault of oil?

Participant I don't put the blame on oil [at all]. I mean, oil like any other "thing", we need it. I don't have a problem with that. What I mean is that I'm not sure that it is a good thing to learn that there's oil in Mauritania. It's not the same thing at all! I don't put any blame on oil. I say that according to the current situation, and seeing how it works here, seeing that the "faults" [of Mauritania]! ... That's it, I mean, let's imagine that indeed we do find significant oil. I have no problem with oil. It's as if I said I had a problem with water. "I don't like that there's too much water in this country". That's not the question. [The question] is "Are we capable of managing it or not? ", and for me, "[it's] no! ".

Researcher Don't you think so?

Participant Honestly, I would prefer that we restrict ourselves to our fishery, our ores and you know, kind of [leave the petroleum for] the Senegalese [to deal with]. It would work out very well! I think that [oil] can be detrimental [to the development and security of a country], just as it can be [a] positive [precipitator of development]... I saw examples where [indeed] it was detrimental, and here [in Mauritania], where we have nearly nothing... I felt that it was going to be very harmful. Therefore, if we indeed

have [significant reserves of] of oil, I can imagine the extent to which it could be more than harmful. That's all, full stop...

Reference 7 - 0.86% Coverage

- Researcher** When a country discovers oil and the country next to it does not discover oil, the Gross National Product of the country that does not have oil increases whereas the GNP of country with oil decreases. Why do you think that happens?
- Participant** Well, that wouldn't surprise me... How many oil-producing countries either are in civil war or have a high level of instability?

Reference 8 - 0.37% Coverage

- Participant** If [oil] is indeed a catalyst of events that cause instability, [then] in a [socio-political] climate which is not going very well [as in Mauritania], then you are not supposed to add to it [such a detrimental catalyst], you see?

Reference 9 - 1.34% Coverage

- Participant** We have had, and that for a long time, what is needed to meet the needs of people of Mauritania effectively and for [economic activities] to be into place [by now]... However, there has been absolutely no development, none at all! In addition, no one [of the ordinary population] receives adequately in order to maintain an appropriate standard of living. No one even sees the colour [of the money that comes in to the country], is able to smell it or whatever you want. Therefore, because of this environment, does it not seem logical that I consider most dangerous the petroleum industry [and its revenues] which are being established [in my country]! Especially given that it does not and will not [feed the population]. Consider the fact that we still have people in this country who are suffering from hunger, that it is difficult to get food, and this in spite of the fact that our waters have the most abundant resources of fish on the planet...

24. <Internals\\Interviews - Westerns\\Q51A 120130 Maur Woodside Exploration Director 51A> - § 1 reference coded [1.26% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.26% Coverage

- Participant** I recall at the time, and through your research, you may be able to get a handle on this as well: it was that... The story I heard, whether it's true or not but the story I heard, was that there was a US\$ 100 million blowout in the Mauritanian government budget for the [2007] financial year.
- Researcher** Yes?
- Participant** In order to balance their books and demonstrate that they were managing their funds well, the government needed to find US\$ 100 million. That is where I think the magic number of US\$ 100 million

came from. As I said, you are probably in a better position to understand the background of that. However, that was something I do remember hearing at the time.

25. <Internals\Interviews - Westerns\Q52A 120130 Maur Woodside Exploration Manager in Maur 52A> - § 1 reference coded [3.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.58% Coverage

- Researcher** Was there a link between the petroleum and the coups that occurred in 2003, 2005 or 2008. Was instability in the government causing the problem or...?
- Participant** This is... One can never be certain on any of these things because it's politics. Nevertheless, the country, when we went there, was very much ruled by "The President" who had been there since the late seventies [actually 1984]. In addition, he is... He'd been very autocratic in what he'd done. He was looking after his own tribal people [but] he was quite well respected. Still, he was getting older and you could sense that the people were waiting for a little change in the future. Probably the change was accelerated when hydrocarbons were found, because that then said their economy was likely to change from being nomadic or... Most of their economy was "laundering" and fish...

26. <Internals\Interviews - Westerns\Q53A 120227 Maur Woodside Maur Country Manager 53A> - § 2 references coded [5.05% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.46% Coverage

- Participant** If you go back to the changes made in government, there was this desire to bring an oil ministry into fruition.
- Researcher** And an oil company as well. Remember?
- Participant** And the Chinguetti production project under the oil Ministry! That was an interesting situation because the models that they were proposing, were models that were drafted and put together by the Tunisians. These was influenced by the [Shankar?] group which had close ties to the Trabelsi family [the family of the wife of ex-President Ben Ali] ... because its leader was [also] Tunisian, tied to many elite families in that country, and tied himself to the [Trabelsi] tribe. Thus, out of nowhere comes the influence of the Tunisians in setting up an organisation [for the petroleum industry].
- Researcher** Very, very interesting and very messy...
- Participant** That was not that clear and transparent. It was to the chagrin of the World Bank, because the World Bank saw that "governance and transparency were keys, if this revenue stream was going to be established". They had a project called PRISM 2. It was particularly aligned with the mining industry. Part of that PRISM project was to enhance the government's capability to manage the new revenue streams. Therefore, there was a big push to try to see if PRISM 2

could actually be broadened to take it on board, [and] help structure the government to manage these new streams, educating them with the new capability to do so. However, that was rejected by ministers and certain other people, because of the tie-up between the contractors such as Shankar, and the ministers and elites.

Reference 2 - 1.59% Coverage

- Researcher** Is there a link between the grab for power and oil in that country, [especially in the light of] the beginning of the oil industry?
- Participant** ... There's no question that in this case, that it is a significant [factor]... I don't think it's the only thing. It's a significant [factor]. Because there [was] a perception... that any revenue stream [or] benefit was going to go to the privileged lot... Because of that, it probably emboldened people to say, "No, we can't keep doing this... Here is probably, our one and only opportunity to really do something significant and give us the ability to better ourselves... We're not just going to sit by and let it happen without us doing something about it!"

27. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q08A 110406 Maur Commercial Manager
Habib Questionnaire> - § 2 references coded [1.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.45% Coverage

- Participant** In the industry, in which I am working, it has created many activities, it has created investments, it has attracted new foreign companies are based here in our country... Therefore, that is very positive.

Reference 2 - 1.13% Coverage

- Participant** So, the criticism that is levelled at this situation, you see, is that the government is becoming dependent upon these foreign companies and will facilitate a company's entry and operations, instead of making life more pleasant for the voters that have brought in the government. The government does obtain some taxes for population, and so the government must treat the voting individual very well, as it is his vote that counts! In fact, here, I am in fact talking about my pet-subject, but in cases where a company pays big revenues, for example an oil company, the government [does its bidding and] doesn't give a damn about the little people. Nevertheless, that is where Abdel Aziz does very well at the moment.

28. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q16A 110411 Maur Hotel accountant Questionnaire 16A WMA> - § 2 references coded [0.82% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.14% Coverage

Participant Mauritania is a very rich country. It has all the opportunities... to grow.

Reference 2 - 0.68% Coverage

Researcher So there are huge revenues (inaudible). How would Mauritania handle this?

Participant ... Even if [Mauritania found] its own], Mauritania would never develop... Because of its elites!!

Researcher Does money runs into the elites' pockets?

Participant The people who... the people who run this [country]... They don't... There's no transparency. There's always...there's always [social] injustice.

29. <Internals\Interviews - White Maures\Q25A 110418 Maur Hotel Economist Sidi
Questionnaire 25A> - § 2 references coded [1.73% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.27% Coverage

Participant Well, I have an idea but I can't tell you exactly. I don't know what was really generated by petroleum. I know, however, that during the years 2003, 2002, 2004, until 2005, regarding the hotel business... Oil brought much [revenues]...

Reference 2 - 1.46% Coverage

Participant For example, we are in a country where there is a decree that forbids alcohol. The thing is, I would prefer a [special] site to be demarked [for its consumption]... Because I have seen [things]! Because there are things that we [culturally] do not know! If children, our children went in there [his hands go into the air in supplication]... We are Maures... It is the Westerners who come, who do these [bad things]... [It is] those who come... What our religion forbids us [to do]; we have to respect [its rules]. So [special places] should have been created. That is what has now to be done...

Researcher So that Westerners can [have their entertainment]?

Participant So that Westerners can... Even if it i on the beach, or in private hotels, or in closed places. It has to be for them. However, it is not going to be...

Researcher Open?

Participant [It must be]... Divided, [not] open. It is not good for the country's religion. You know, when you're told, that it's a Muslim country...

Researcher It has to be respected!

Participant ... And [at the present time] it's not being respected. There may be other changes [driven by the westerners' influence] which will drive

[some] to terrorism, which will drive to lots of things, [people] who don't want their country to be poor, well we'll have an idea...

Researcher Is it Corruption?

Participant ... We will have an impression that the country may be conquered [overrun?] by Westerners [and their values].

30. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q28A 110420 Maur ex-DG Geology & Mines Arafa Questionnaire 28A> - § 1 reference coded [0.62% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.62% Coverage

Participant There were projects that brought a lot to the country, really.

Researcher: What opportunities have they brought?

Participant: They ... created jobs. This is very important, because they have brought us a contribution towards the national budget. Well, [the contribution from the exploitation of our minerals] was a very small [budgetary contribution]; at the time of the Morak company [copper-gold mining company at Akjoujt]; at the time of MIFERMA [iron ore mining venture], but as time went on, these operations became more efficient and benefits [from these] towards the budget increased... [bringing] a positive knock-on effect for the country.

31. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q28H 110421 Maur Ex-DG Geol & Mines Arafa Questionnaire 28H> - § 1 reference coded [12.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 12.58% Coverage

Participant I believe that it is the people with a rentier-attitude that [drove the socio-political development of Mauritania of the last twenty years]... In the 1990s, there was a lot of money around... Some people say it might have been the World Bank or some other institutions that gave funds [to the internal economy] in anticipation of the oil boom to come. Others say that it may have been moneys from drug trafficking. I don't know... Some also say that it may have been connected to money laundering... Nevertheless, there were many, many large constructions projects in the country and intense [economic] activity. As a result [of this], "lobbies" began to form which envied those that they could see taking advantage [rent] of state revenues , and could see that those people who obtained these projects [rents] from the state were [the elites associated to the president and his tribe]...

Researcher That is it! That is what I mean by "rentier elites".

Participant Those people extracted finances [from the state]... They obtained all the projects. This caused envy in other people who wanted these [lucrative] projects. They thus sought to change the system so that they too [or in place] would be rentier- beneficiaries themselves. This then, can explain to some extent what happened prior to the coming of petroleum... However, it is not for me [to point the finger] ... In any case, it is not oil which [caused the socio-political problems]

of the last ten years]... but it is the anticipation of oil [and its revenues]... [An elite] had to be well positioned in wait for the [coming of] oil [revenues]...

Researcher And that's what may have caused problems?

Participant It was these lobbies that created the problem... In my opinion, I think that [it is those] lobbies, which in combination with other particular circumstances combined and lead to...

Researcher Did the tribal system [have a role to play in this]?...

Participant A little... That's the explanation given by people... It is the cover people give to these events... It is either a tribal explanation that is given, or a racial one or a regional cover... Nevertheless, it is in fact mainly about personal interests... [personal] interests...

32. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q32A 111213 Maur accountant M Fall Ould Bah General disc 32A> - § 4 references coded [6.34% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.29% Coverage

Participant ... at the end of the 1990s, Maaouya Ould Taya, the president at the time, had some “minor” disagreements with France. He began to move away a little from France, and in doing so got closer to the Americans. That's how we see things here [in Mauritania]... From our point of view, in 1984 Maaouya came to power with France's assistance. At the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of years 2000, Maaouya moved away from France and even threw out few French diplomats, etc.

He got closer, or rather, he “would have gotten closer” to the United States... It has to be put in the conditional as it is not as clear as all that. However, it may be close to the truth.

It is said that petroleum in Mauritania came about under his encouragement with the backing [of foreigners?]. Under his authority and backing [because he was now] free of France.

That is why it is not Total that discovered oil in Mauritania.

That is the way we reason [explain the events], and we say that, with the 2005 coup, France began to rebuild its [dominant] position in the political scene of Mauritania... That's what is what is commonly believed.

Reference 2 - 1.55% Coverage

Researcher In 2003, there was already an attempted coup. There was a coup d'état which did not fail in 2005, There was a “palace coup”, if you want [to call it that], in 2008. You think there's a link with oil?

Participant: According to most people, according to analysts there's a link, there's a link somewhere.

The potential of [revenues from] oil is behind all the greed, of the personal as well as the tribal greed [you see].

Because it is not for nothing [for misery] that you “kill” someone.

If we kill each other, it's because there are indeed some real prospect [of enrichment] and it is said that petroleum does cause [such as effect on people]. Some authors even say that "oil goes hand-in-hand with social conflict...

Reference 3 - 0.72% Coverage

Participant In the period that petroleum began to be talked about, the [social and political] situation was relatively stable. The socio-political situation [of Mauritania] is [indeed] relatively complex, but Ould Taya had managed to stabilize it. However, "seeds of violence" remained, most especially with the Negro-Africans [population] in particular....
There were "seeds of violence" [racial tensions]...

Reference 4 - 1.78% Coverage

Participant In 2003, there was a coup attempt that failed, and we were scared. We were scared but we thought to ourselves, "it is normal". It's normal, because there is petroleum potential being proven and the political elites don't want to share its revenues. It is [therefore] normal that people [agitate, so as to make known that they] want a share in it.

Researcher: A share of the revenues?

Participant: Then, there was the 2005 putsch; we thought to ourselves, "that's it; all the problems of Mauritania are solved!" Mauritania is a country potentially rich in oil, and we have now the political in place to have an [equitable] sharing [in it]... We now have [hope]. Moreover, the military came to power saying, "we don't want to hang onto power". They emphasised, "we don't want the power for ourselves, we are going to organise elections and we will leave. We are going to stabilize the situation and bring democracy to Mauritania"...

33. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q43C 111231 Maur chief of cabinet Dahi & wife on WOODSIDE 46A> - § 1 reference coded [1.07% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.07% Coverage

Participant No, that was not Woodside [that brought problems to Mauritania], it was petroleum!

Wife It was the "oil"! We dreamt of "oil"! We told you, we dreamt of it!!!

34. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q45A 111226 Maur ex-Mins Econ Affairs
Elabed on Mauritanian politics 45A>

Reference 1 - 0.42% Coverage

Researcher: No link at all with oil then?

Participant: Most probably there is one! most probably there is! There most probably is a link with oil! Also very probably, there is a link with the geostrategic interests of France and of the United States...

Reference 2 - 2.11% Coverage

Participant An attachment to a country that is where you have your childhood memories! It is when certain places give rise to emotions within you. [It is] where there are the graves over which you can recollect yourself in silent contemplation... However, for "him" [President Abdel Aziz], he does not have that link with the country. We, we have it in our hearts! [As for] him, he has that "link" only with his pocket! It's clear that through his behaviour that the only things in which he is interested in are the natural resources of this country, which he wishes to keep to himself and increase his own personal fortune.

Researcher: Do you think so?

Participant: Oh yes, I do. That is why I say that the story of petroleum is related. It definitely is involved... Everybody has said that Mauritania has an enormous potential... That it could become one of the principal African producers, and we realised that through the present rush of [oil] companies into the country. I have welcomed many, many investment parties; Europeans, South-Americans, North-Americans, Asians and Arabs, everyone has come [to Mauritania].

Reference 3 - 1.03% Coverage

Participant We were even told that ... "That the [petroleum] potential [of Mauritania] has been well known for years... since the end of the 1960s, when there was "Western Sahara" war. During the Saharan war, and the nationalisation of the iron-ore company MIFERMA by President Ould Daddah, given that the [world oil] reserves were large and that world production at the time was sufficient and met [world] demand relatively well, the big oil groups thought to themselves, "it's not worth [developing Mauritania's petroleum resource] at the moment, we have to leave the Mauritanian [offshore] oil and in the other area [onshore Taoudeni basin] in reserve.... "

Reference 4 - 0.26% Coverage

Participant Petroleum was certainly an issue [of importance], at the national level just as much as the regional level... for Morocco, Algeria... and most [especially] for France.

Reference 5 - 0.59% Coverage

Participant There's the reversal of the contract modifications [of 2004]!. We now have a more balanced set of conditions that are much more favourable towards Mauritania [rather than for the contractor]. By way of compensation [for the problems it created for Mauritania], Woodside "offered" [to compensate the government] US 100 million.

That US 100 million, we included in the 2007 state budget and made a documented financial note [submitted for record].

Reference 6 - 7.00% Coverage

Participant No, no, I don't believe that the country went into debt based on the belief that it would be able to repay loans through future oil revenues. The fact was that we were considered [by the World Bank] to be within the group of nations designated as "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries" (HIPC) and had to follow the HIPC Initiative [as set by the IMF]. The PPTE is the economic programme set for the very poor countries which have become heavily in debt and that therefore have obligations in terms of keeping the level of debt at a sustainable level. In addition, we still always had, even if there were periods when it wasn't the case, a program with the World Bank that applied very strict conditions in terms of resorting to debt above the allowed monetary ceiling.

Therefore, I do not think that we were subjected to this setback because of oil. We could examine a possible second setback, a sort of "Dutch Disease". We wanted to avoid it through a specific fund management mechanism of the expected oil revenues. We felt that we should use oil [revenues], if they came to reality. [We would use the oil revenues] as a tool to develop other sectors [of the economy]; to develop agriculture; to develop tourism; to develop [needed] services and we [thus planned] to consider this. I think the unsuccessful experiences of countries like the oil-producing countries of Algeria, Nigeria and Libya [for example] helped to open our eyes as well as those of other new oil-producing countries.

Researcher: Mauritania took that [aspect of development] into account?

Participant: [Mauritania indeed] took that into account. At the time, we had studied the experiences of all the countries and drew our inspiration from two countries in particular which had managed very well their oil resources; [the UK with its] North Sea oil, which is very carefully managed; and that of the Norwegian system, I believe. [We also studied] another African country, I am not sure if it's Botswana... We consulted them on several occasions; there were several trade missions, there were several study missions and we took that information into account as the petroleum industry developed. So, from a purely conceptual basis, I think the country was ready to efficiently manage its oil revenues in a manner that would not render it slave to that rent, and in a manner that mean development without dependency... This was because, as we believed at the time, it was out of the question to engage in large [costly] projects while we awaited these oil revenues. We would not enter into such projects, we were to be very prudent, giving priority to first regularising government income.

First we knew that the country has a relatively limited absorption capacity, compelling us to create savings. That is why we created the [Petroleum] Fund. On the other hand, we told ourselves, this wealth

was also not renewable and we have to preserve a share for the benefit of future generations. To safeguard [future generations'] share, we were compelled to deposit [these funds] and invest them in a way that would generate appropriate revenues in 10, 20 or even 30 years. [We had to ensure that not all the oil revenues were wasted immediately] in certain projects, I do not know, such as [useless?] buildings. We should not try to create a Dubai out of Mauritania!!! No, no, we wanted infrastructures for people and above all, we wanted to develop social sectors that created human capital, education, health... If production had carried on – had continued as it had been initially anticipated; at 75.000 barrels a day, our forecasts at the end of ten years would have been that state funds from the investment revenue of the oil takings, would have been equal to the revenues from oil production itself. That was an envisaged scenario...

35. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q46B 111231 Maur ex-Director of Treasury Dhehbi on internal politics 46B WMA> Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.58% Coverage

Participant They showed us some barrels on the television. The Minister said "There's oil [in Mauritania], here is the proof". There is nothing! We had started to dream! There is nothing!

Reference 2 - 0.67% Coverage

Participant In any case, for us, the Mauritanian people, we don't care about oil deposits, because the common people find no gain in it. Look, we [apparently] have gold [produced from this country], [but] There is a crisis all the same!. We [the people] see nothing of the gold. This gold, being produced in this country, is put in airplanes and it goes....

36. <Internals\\Interviews - White Maures\\Q48A 120101 Maur ex-Minister Isselmou Abdelkader on politics 48A> - § 5 references coded [4.60% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.31% Coverage

Participant With the discovery of petroleum, and really beginning when concrete policies concerning mining and oil exploration were being formulated [by the government]... .. yet more greed began emerging [in the elites]! ... From 2001... the discovery of oil had changed ambitions... Oil had especially changed the ambitions of the army and ruling [elites].

Reference 2 - 0.60% Coverage

Participant Not only had [wealth] disparities [between rich and poor] had increased under Ould Taya's regime, [but oil] had especially begun to “sharpen”... and heighten the greed of the army [elites]... [in addition] the [economic] potential of Mauritania... having petroleum [revenues], as well as mining [revenues] from Tasiast, and other [mining projects]... produced new [and heightened] political and economic ambitions in certain the "groups" [lobbies or tribes?] ... These had lost importance [for a while]. However, they now found rebirth, grew stronger and developed under Ould Taya. These same groups altered the country's history [when they overthrew President Taya].

Reference 3 - 0.28% Coverage

Participant And that's why there was a coup... but [Taya] had already been undermined by his entourage... or [rather] by the tribal [elites] and officers around him, those that had benefited the most maybe from his generosity; in particular the wealthy Smacide Bouamatou, the wealthy Oualad Bousba army officer, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall.

Reference 4 - 1.07% Coverage

Participant It's a very rich country. There are lots of resources. It's a new country, extremely vast... (Inaudible) ... It's a country where the state is in its infancy, where the state... is in a complete formational genesis from all point of views. The historical point of view, human point of view, political point of view, ideological point of view...
... ... There are tribes... which try to acquire the "shadow" of the state [create for themselves a monopoly of accessible state rents]. In such circumstances [where rent-seekers elites compete with the state for its revenues], a [foreign] mining [or petroleum] company may avoid systematically and substantially contributing to the stabilization of the state and its political system [and help certain business and political elites to line their pockets].
However, such a company will invariably suffer from a political backlash [when the political structure changes] and invariably loose its investments. That is absolutely obvious!
In order to have stability in the political system, however, there's only one avenue. The avenue to follow in the first place is to accelerate the [ethnic] integration process that will allow the setting up of a democratic system... Secondly, [there is the set-up of] a transparency regarding the management of resources, good governance, and a good distribution of revenues. It is therefore paramount that business entities, the companies, involved themselves with the political system. [NOTE: this is the same demand as that presented by Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall].

Reference 5 - 2.34% Coverage

- Researcher** So... we talked about Babana, we talked about Daddah. Let's talk about Taya. In all three cases, it is said that external influences were involved... [With] Babana, there was fear [of foreign intervention]... outsiders were not wanted... "We want to resolve our own problems as Mauritians"... All the same, there was an indeed external influence that toppled Babana and which brought in Daddah [as first President]. The French were in that? In 1978, Saleck came... Was Daddah bothering someone? Maybe it was the French [again]?
- Participant** No. That's... No. It is automatic...
- Researcher** OK, wait... there was [the nationalisation of] MIFERMA, [there was the war of] Western Sahara.... Saleck!... The French [who were behind the fall of Daddah, were [also] behind Taya's [fall]]? As well, in 2005, 2003, 2005 and 2008. There was oil. There was Al-Qaeda. There was Ely. There was Aziz... Was it the French, or maybe the Americans this time, who were playing the game of external interference?
[First] Babana, [then] Daddah, [then] Saleck, [then] Taya, [now] Aziz???
- Participant** Everywhere... there has never been a coup in Mauritania that was not instigated... or supported by the French Embassy.
- Researcher** The French Embassy was involved in all... [the coups d'état]?
- Participant** The French Embassy was involved in all [of them]! It was involved! Because in 1975, 1978, it's true... the French Jaguar planes helped Mauritania, etc. [The French President] Giscard d'Estaing helped [our] President Daddah. It's true! Nevertheless, we also knew very well, that Mauritania could not win the war without the strong implication of France.
However, there was something much more important [than the support of the French]. It was the cooperation between President Daddah and the Moroccans, a cooperation that had come to a level that worried the French politicians. There is something fundamental, something constant in the French politics. In French politics, the desire is that Morocco never becomes too closely allied with Mauritania. That's a fact...
It is believed that Morocco is a country with political ambitions of enlarging its territory. It is an Arab country, a country that acted as the starting point, the origin of the Arab invasion of Europe in the 8th century. Do you understand?
The French have always wanted to keep Mauritania as a buffer zone, a neutral zone that it does not wish to see fall under the influence of either Algeria or that of Morocco [and continue to sway its national and international policies and thus influence its political landscape].

End of the selected quotes.

Appendix 10 – Participants’ perception of “Oil Curse” for Mauritania

Each participants’ perception of the relevance of the “Oil Curse” to Mauritania, on a direct question of a link between petroleum and the coup attempts, government overthrows and successful coup d’états of 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2009

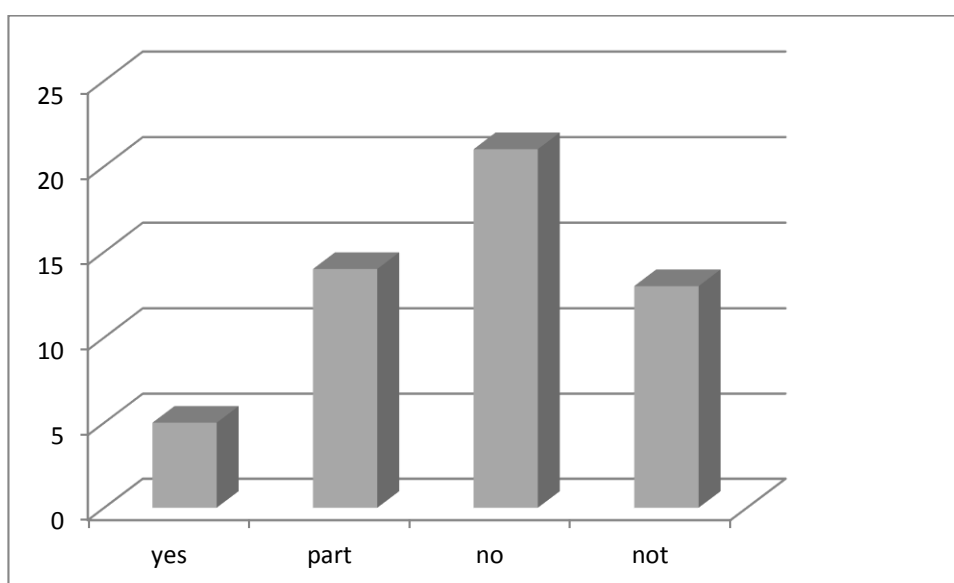
	Participant's Name	Quote from each participant relevant to the "oil curse" (answers divisible into four categories; Totally blame oil, partially blame oil, don't blame oil, question not answered)
1	Sidaty Fall	Chose not to answer the question
2	Toutane Diakité	"Oil can be a blessing and generate wealth for all, but"...
3	Amadou N'daye	"If you did not cheap and embezzle you didn't get anywhere. Now with Aziz, things are straightening out, but let's see?"
4	Dada O/M. Lemine	"No, oil had no link with the 2005 coup. Maaouya Had been in power too long and his management of the country had been failing"
5	Anonymous	"Because of oil there is inflation and elite enrichment"
6	Fatimatou Doudou Diop	Chose not to answer the question
7	Ciré Ly	"there is mismanagement of revenues by the government"
8	Habib O/Adaya O/Jiddou	Chose not to answer the question
9	Anonymous	"The discovery of oil was good for the economy"
10	Maimouna Diallo	"Unfortunately the country will be hit by the "oil curse". Because here, the majority (of elites) are driven by greed" (blame greed)
11	Gaye-Silly Soumare	"The 2005 coup occurred due to dissatisfaction with Taya"
12	Abidine	"It is not a very stable country. Well before oil"
13	Ely O/Sneiba	"Instability due to plundering of state resources by elites"
14	Ibrahim Mangane	"No, oil was not the reason. Maaouya have made many errors over a long time. He had to be removed. In 2008, it was the corruption"
15	Mariam M'Bow	"In Mauritania, coups are the norm. In 2008, Aziz overthrew Abdallahi because he was mismanaging the country. His wife ran it"
16	Anonymous	Chose not to answer the question
17	M. Traore	"A tribe monopolised the state and its revenues"
18	Ahmed O/Cheikh	"No it was not oil's arrival that caused the coups. Taya has sat in the president's chair for more than twenty years!"
19	Souleymane Niang	"Oil money acts as a catalyst to problems"
20	Ali Lamine Diallo	"There was strong dissatisfaction Taya's management of the country"
21	Anonymous	"No, it was not oil! It was elites' power grabbing. Also, some were dissatisfied with the government's mismanagement"
22	Isselmou M. Lemine	"Social problems occupied his interest"

23	Boubacar Alpha Athié	"It is only a coincidence for oil and overthrow of Taya together"
24	Anonymous	Chose not to answer the question
25	Sidi M O/M. Lemine	Chose not to answer the question
26	Dia Amadou	"Where there is oil, there are problems!" (general blame on oil)
27	M. Faoud Barrada	"social problems predated oil discovery"
28	M'Boye O/Arafa	"They sought to gain power so that they too could draw future rents"
29	M. Ba Abdouh Moussa	"I fear the discovery of oil ,because it means trouble" (general blame on oil)
30	Hamadi M. Hamadi	"I do not think there is a direct link. There were many other problems at the same time as a President that was being used"
31	Coulibaly Aly	"It is the state and the foreign companies that are at fault"
32	M. Fall O/ Bah	"because there is the prospect of enrichment with oil, men will kill each other for it" (blame greed)
33	Anonymous	Chose not to answer the question
34	Pierre Bonte	"When there is petroleum, there will always be someone to share in the loot. And tribal alliances change accordingly"
35	Zacharia O/Ahmed Salem	"It may have played a minor role, but we must admit that it was the final days of a nepotistic and corrupt regime"
36	M. Said O/Hamody	"when a country has limited means, inequalities arise. When oil comes, the foreign companies must help to manage it"
37	Anonymous	"I don't believe the upheavals of 2003, 2005, etc were related to petroleum. There are deeper causes... since 1978"
38	Anonymous	"Inflation came with oil. Unstable regimes do not need oil discoveries" (blame oil for inflationary effect)
39	Anonymous	"I was not sure the coming of oil was a good event. There were dollar signs in everyone's eyes" (blame oil for inflationary effect)
40	M. Sidina O/Khabuz	Chose not to answer the question
41	Ely Ould Mohamed Vall	Chose not to answer the question
42	Anonymous	"with the multiparty system, came back tribalism and all its related problems of nepotism, corruption, etc"
43	M. Lemine Dahi	"No, it was not Woodside that brought problems, it was the petroleum!" (general blame on oil)
44	Abdou Salam Tabane	Chose not to answer the question
45	Mohamed O/ Elabed	"there are geostrategic interests, but also Abdel Aziz has that link with his pocket"
46	Mohamed Ould Dhehbi	Chose not to answer the question
47	Mahfoud O/Bettah	"I do not think there is a link. It was more the corrupt government in place that was the cause".

48	Isselmou O/Abdelkader	"The discovery of oil changed ambitions, and sharpened the greed of the army elites" (blame greed)
49	M. El Hacen O/Lebatt	Chose not to answer the question
50	M. Lemine Abdallah	"Petroleum? That was not the motivation. Taya and the elites were there, and they ate all!"
51	Agu Kantsler - Ex-expl Director	Chose not to answer the question
52	Woodside International Exploration Manager	"Oil may have acted as a catalyst to the 2005 Govt overthrow"
53	Ex-Woodside In-country Manager	"It is a significant factor, but it is not the only factor"

Categorisation of participants answers to blaming petroleum for the political upheavals

Petroleum discovery and development in Mauritania is totally to blame for the political problems suffered since 2001 (many were emotional responses)	5	13%
Petroleum discovery and development in Mauritania maybe partially to blame, and to varying degree, for the political problems suffered since 2001	14	35%
Petroleum is not to blame for the political upheavals that have occurred since 2001. The Mauritanian conditions and factors predating petroleum are to blame	21	52%
Consciously or unconsciously, the question was not answered,	13	-



Summary and conclusion

5 participants, or 13% of those that gave an answer, put total blame on petroleum for the “problems” of Mauritania. Where assigned in a general manner, it was usually put to the researcher in an emotional context. In one case, the wife of Mohamed Ould Dahi (Participant 43) interjected with an angry outburst against the foreign participants, blaming Woodside for the inflationary turn the economy had taken in the last few years.

14 participants (35%) placed partial blame for the political upheavals on petroleum but to varying degree. The most prevalent effect blamed of petroleum, was that it had awakened the greed of elites, and this came from participants in the lower economic categories (Afro-Mauritanians and Haratin participants). The greed of elites had been the cause of great inflation that had influenced in a very negative way on the poorer segments of the Mauritanian society.

21 participants, or 52% of participants and including the majority of the more learned and read Maures that participated in the research, felt that the government overthrows would have occurred anyway, as it is within the character of the Mauritanians and the manner of the society. Several pointed out that all changes in country leadership had been by military overthrows.

13 chose not to answer the question, ignoring it wilfully in the case of elites, including Colonel Ely Mohamed Vall, one of the leading perpetrators of the 2005 overthrow of President Taya and leader of the military council 2005 to 2007. In many case with participants of lower economic class and often of an low educational level, the question was willingly or unconsciously left unanswered merely out of ignorance.

In summary, 87% of participants downplayed the role of petroleum in the social and political upheavals that occurred between 2001 and 2011.

Appendix 11 - The presidents and leaders of Mauritania

President / Leader	Period	Upheaval / immediate reason
France granted independence to Mauritania in November 1960. Moktar Ould Daddah was named Acting President of the new republic. He was confirmed in office in the first post-independent election in August 1961		
Moktar Ould Daddah	20 August 1961 – 10 July 1978	Deposed in a Coup d'état / Issue over Western Sahara War
Imposition of a Military Committee for National Salvation (CMRN)		
Mustapha Ould Saleck	10 July 1978 - 6 April 1979	Reduced to a figurehead / Resigned as Head of State
Ahmad Ould Bouceif	6 April 1979 – 27 May 1979	Died in suspicious air crash /
Mohamed M. Ould Louly	3 June 1979 – 4 January 1980	Deposed in a coup d'état / Different tribal objectives to Haidallah
Mohamed K. Ould Haidallah	4 January 1980 – 12 December 1984	Deposed in a coup d'état / Arabisation and issue-related
Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya	12 December 1984 – 18 April 1992	Military - civilian transition
Civilian rule and multiparty system demanded by France		
Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya	19 April 1992 – 3 August 2005	Deposed in a coup d'état / Too long as Head of State
Imposition of a Military Council for Justice and Democracy		
Ely Mohamed Vall	3 August 2005 – 19 April 2007	Military – civilian transition
Civilian elections		
Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi	19 April 2007 – 6 August 2008	Deposed in a coup d'état / Corrupt and weak
Imposition of Military High Council of State		
Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz	6 August 2008 – 15 April 2009	Steps down as Head of State
Ba Mamadou M'Baré	15 April 2009 – 5 August 2009	Interim Head of State
Civilian elections		Constitutional Coup
Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz	5 August 2009 – 2 nd term begins after 2014 elections	President of Mauritania